

BUILDING FROM THE OUTSIDE-IN: TRAINING
CHURCH LEADERS TO RECONNECT SOULS
TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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by
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United Theological Seminary, 2023

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This project will be implemented at Jerusalem Baptist Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Community members are no longer actively engaged in church yet consider themselves Christians. If church leaders participate in a training about community evangelism, then they will be equipped to teach lay members how to evangelize that increases community engagement. This project will be seven weeks. Data collection methods will include group discussions, journal writings, interviews with surveys. Because church leaders will participate in a training about community evangelism, then they will be equipped to teach lay members to evangelize that increases community engagement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“God is my all and all.” These lyrics from late Rev. James Cleveland, epitomize how I feel about the completion of this project. For without God, I would have never been able to see this project to its completion. I am grateful to Him for His strength in my times of weakness, His wisdom in my times of ineffectiveness and His grace in my times of error.

Thank you to the great people of United Theological Seminary. Our president, Dr. Kent Millard and our Doctor of Ministry Dean, Dr. Sadler. Thank you to the staff and our teachers as well. I am eternally indebted to two of God’s best leaders and practitioners, Bishop Sir Walter Mack Jr., and Dr. Herbert Miller II. Thank you for your “yes” to the Kingdom of God and your leadership as our focus group mentors.

Special thank you to the great people of the Jerusalem Baptist Church. You have allowed me serve as your pastor from 2013 until now. I thank you for your prayers and those who helped in the formulation of this project. Thank you as well to Dr. Lloyd Hervey II, Dr. Juliana Mosely-Williams, Dr. Lonnie E. Anderson Jr., Dea. Jose Reed, Rev. Byron Calhoun, and Sis. Crystal Perry for your help and encouragement every step of the way.

Finally, I give thanks to my parents, Pastor Isaac and Evangelist Janice Culver for your love and prayers. My brothers, Rev. Isaac A. Culver, and Cedric Sommerville for your support. To my children, Madalyn Francis, and Maurice Jr. for being my piece of heaven here on Earth and heartbeat of my day. However, I cannot close without the love

of my life. Marrisa, you have been with me for the past twenty years, as a friend, confidant, my wife, the mother of my children and my ultimate encourager. You saw greatest inside of me from day one and I have been extremely blessed to fall in love with you. Thank you for sharing life with me and believing that I could become a Doctor in the Lord's church. You are my everything and I love with you all of me.

DEDICATION

This work would not be if I was not for Rev. J.A. Rucker Sr.; Mrs. Frances Jeanette Rucker, Deacon Isaac Culver Sr., and Mother Anne Culver whom all rest from the labor and their works do follow them.

Thank you for a solid foundation is Christ Jesus.

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INTRODUCTION

My journey began in January 2021. I cannot remember the exact date, but it was here where I began my journey as a “Doctor of Ministry” student at United Theological Seminary. Due to the uneasiness and dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic, I began my first semester in my church office looking at a computer screen. I had no idea of what was ahead of me but I knew I wanted to fulfill a promise that I made to God, my wife and myself that I would complete this advanced degree by the age of thirty-five.

I remember our first session with Dr. Elvin Sadler our incoming associate dean at that time and then by that after I got a chance to meet my mentors, Bishop Sir Walter Mack, and Dr. Herbert Miller. Once I had chosen this group, I did a little research to see who they were, and I said to my wife this is the right group for me. I got a chance to meet some persons who were already in our cohort and getting ready to graduate and then Dr. Miller called my name. I unmuted myself so that I could speak on our Zoom call while he asked me the question, “What is your project about?”

To be honest, I had no idea what he meant by project. Just finishing a master’s degree that summer before and taking a brief hiatus I had no idea what to expect. I didn’t know if this was a trick question and I didn’t want to look unprepared, so I gave the best answer that came to mind, “Sir, I have no idea.” Dr. Miller stated, “Great answer”. Dr.

Miller and Dr. Mack began to inform me and the other first semester students that the “Doctor of Ministry” degree is a journey. Moreover, I must say they were totally correct.

I started this journey seeking to be help to pastors. See as a pastor’s grandson, son, and a pastor myself I have a keen awareness of what we go through. I have seen pastors allow the struggles of ministry wear them down. I did research on how pastors suffered with illnesses, fatigue, and trauma. I read article after article about how pastors are faced with the harsh reality that life can still happen. I completed my work and passed Candidacy Review. I received my letter of readiness from our Institutional Review Board and when it came time to initiate my project it was as if God placed a heavenly roadblock in front of me.

I will discuss this later, but God shifted my mind and helped me to see that just as pastors were dealing with the issues mentioned before, so were the people of my context. My current ministry context is the Jerusalem Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was called to serve this church in 2016. You will learn more about them and our synergistic relationship as pastor and people. Still, I noticed that several persons claimed membership in our church but were inactive in their attendance and stewardship. They were and are undoubtedly Christians whom the grace of God has saved, but for some reason or another, they do not regularly attend worship.

In a conversation with one of my parishioners, I found that their relative had been absent from regular church attendance for almost thirty years. In speaking with other congregants, they had similar stories of having children, grandchildren, spouses, friends, etc. who love God but have not set foot in a house of worship for several years. As I delved deeper into this thought process, I also found some of the same issues that pastors

and their parishioners have faced. Some of the same traumatic experiences, health and financial crises, or personal highs and lows were common. When I saw our church beginning to care for others in our community, I noticed we started to grow. Attendance and stewardship quickly increased, which was possible because we began to reengage a lost community.

Through this journey, you will see how God opened my eyes to how we can reengage lost people. We will first examine the biblical narrative of Ruth and Naomi. Naomi is an excellent example of someone who loved God but has her share of traumatic experiences, from being displaced from her country, moving to Moab, and losing her husband. To raise sickly children, seeing them die young and become a widow to the greatest extent, she has the makings of someone who would write off God and His church.

Through her traumatic experiences, Naomi even changes her name to “Marah” as Ruth 1:20 states, “for the Almighty has made me very bitter.” Nevertheless, she is joined by her daughter-in-law, Ruth, who wouldn’t leave her side. We will examine how Ruth’s courage and persistence helped transform a bitter person into one full of life and faith in God. Moreover, we examine how this can be replicated in the local church’s life. We will then discuss the historical foundation of African American Women before the civil rights movement. Many understand the narrative of the Civil Rights movement in the modern era of Dr. Martin L. King Jr and Malcolm X. However, before them, groups of African American women stepped up to the plate. We will examine how they developed innovative to help and share their community.

We will attempt to show how to the local church needs to adopt the same mentality. If we are not focused on our community, then not only will our churches suffer, but the community will suffer as well. These women groups understood their surrounding community's value and upward mobility. This understanding will certainly enhance our church dynamic.

We will then examine our theological framework of ecclesiology. Ecclesiology, which is the study of the church, became very important in my theological journey. Reclaiming the lost is not only what we do as a church, but it is our clarion call given by Christ Jesus. Failure to do so suggests that we have failed Christ and we have failed to be the church He has ordained. Our primary theologian is Paul Tillich. We will attempt to show his views on ecclesiology and how those views can help the church be more of the community Christ intended for.

Finally, we will examine our interdisciplinary thought process of Watson's Theory of Care. Watson's Theory of Care is a theory used by medical professionals formulated by Jean Watson. I fell in love with this thought process as an aid to our project because of my own experience that healing happens in community. Watson's Theory suggests that healing can be achieved individually, but it can be achieved in community. As stated before, persons were not attending church due to some traumatic experience. History suggests that these persons are judged and outcasted but need healing.

Watson's Theory of Care is rooted in the communal partnership between medical practitioners. Healing can begin when a patient knows that someone cares for them and does not see their disease or disorder. Just because these persons don't attend regularly

does not mean they are not people made in the image of God. They have names. They have likes and dislikes. They, too, have goals and dreams. They, too, have fears and worries. Moreover, if someone in their life sees that, they may win them back to Christ.

As you delve into this material with me, I am certain that you will see my heart. You will see that persons can reconnect with the local church. This reconnection can save your church and your community. Everyone is not lost, for we are all still able to be products of God's amazing grace. Nevertheless, we need tools, thought processes, and solid conversations about reengaging lost persons to their church community. I pray that you will find this discourse meaningful and helpful as you navigate life as a leader in the Lord's church.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The goal of our work as Doctor of Ministry Students is to become doctors of the church. This process is not what I expected. I anticipated classes, lecturers, and seminars on various texts or biblical principles. I envisioned being challenged theologically in eschatology, soteriology, and the different parts of Christian doctrine. However, to be a doctor, there must be some mix between theoretical and practical. There must be some context in which we attempt to apply practical means to what we believe to be true.

This is the case in where I find myself. I am not looking for another book or journal. I am not delving into another article or theoretical search through the scriptures but looking at myself and where God has decided to place me. This process has taught me a lot about me and parameters that have allowed me to be me. I have gained a better appreciation for the grace that God has given me and for those he has placed around me.

However, this process not only had me examine where God has placed me in my current context. This process has been revealing because I honestly began to take for granted the placement. I do not suggest that I placed myself here, but there is a rich history that cannot and should not be ignored. Examining my current context has pushed me to see our positives and negatives, things we do well, and growth areas. Placing my life and my context under the proverbial microscope has given me a framework in which I believe I can best be a church doctor through the power of Jesus Christ.

The following is a summative discourse on my current context and ministerial journey. The two will look at, as mentioned before, those areas that are positive and negative. For the contextual ministry portion, we will take the negative areas and seek to develop a way to help bridge the gap for my current context. We will do so by taking what was learned through my ministerial journey as a caveat on how we can make both come to some level of collaboration.

Context

My church context is the Jerusalem Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, Indiana. The church is in the northeast portion of Indiana and the second most populated city. Jerusalem was organized in 1960, and I now serve as its fourth pastor. Fort Wayne is a thriving city, but just like most midwestern cities, it has experienced population plateauing. In the church's brief history, the pioneering pastor, Pastor Samuel Walker, served the church for nearly forty-five years. Through his influence, the church became what it is today; one of the region's prominent African American and Baptist churches.

The church's heightened area of growth was during the 1960's as many came up north during the end of the Great Migration. During this season, people were moving to the Fort Wayne area in droves from Alabama. Coincidentally, many of the parishioners of our church came from the same regions of Alabama. Many were residents of either Uniontown, Marion, or Birmingham. Moreover, what they did was build a community. Many of the persons in the church were related or connected somehow. Yet they came together on more than just Sunday morning. The church was active in the neighborhood during the Civil Rights era and continued to be a beacon of hope. Hence, this is what the

Black Church experience was about. One writer stated, “Black churches were places where black persons could go not simply to escape the horrors of racism but to celebrate their full humanity as beings created in the image of God.”¹

During this time, the church experienced extraordinary levels of growth and expansion both spiritually, numerically, and financially. In August 2016, I was called to serve as its current pastor. In the contextual analysis of my current ministry setting, I found that the church had several strengths and weaknesses. The strengths mainly focused on the history and present structure of the church. For example, noting the strength of the locale and physical building of the church shows that the church is poised to help the surrounding community.

Jerusalem was one of “the” churches in the community. Its pastor, pastor Samuel Walker, was a force in the community. Several in the church responded to Christ through his leadership, and he was very instrumental in their lives. But not only in their lives, but he was also instrumental in the ebb and flow of the African American community. When civil rights issues or the need for assistance for families became evident, he was one of the prominent persons the community could call. Through his leadership, the church was able to amass property, attach additions to the church building, and establish a reputation for being one of the more solid churches in the community.

There is no doubt that Jerusalem is a solid church, and that is one of its strengths, as we mentioned in the contextual analysis. The church's structure and reputation have withstood time. However, in looking at the contextual analysis, in the current life of the

¹ Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), under “458,” Amazon Kindle.

church, only viewing the church property, structure, and reputation as positives is a minus for today's culture.

However, as we looked at the weaknesses of the church, we were pressed to focus on the inward nature of the church. One of the weaknesses or areas of growth was the falling away of church participation after the worship experience. The church is a relatively Sunday morning experience with little to no "buy-in" for midweek activities. Many come to worship on Sunday but will not be seen again until next week. This may be good for one day of the week, but it is detrimental to a vibrant ministry.

I believe churches must be strong on Sunday as we come together to praise and worship Christ. However, the church's growth occurs in the "in-between times" of Monday-Saturday. Strong churches understand how to make connections after the worship experience to help develop the congregation. They have figured out how to make these connections stick to increase discipleship, membership, and stewardship. Sadly, this is what built Jerusalem, but over time, as with other churches, there has been a falling away.

Furthermore, addressing the needs of the current church culture will help the church focus on its deficiencies. Again, in reviewing the church's strength, there is no mention of Christian education or Christian development. We must remember that the first and foremost goal of the local church is to live like, look like, and emulate Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:1-2 reminds us, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." In his commentary on Ephesians, Warren Wiersbe states, "[Paul] was

not asking them to do something foreign to the Christian life; for we have received a new nature that wants to express itself in love.”²

Being excited about facilities and the physical building is not what Christ intended. As a matter of fact, I do not believe that’s what the pioneers of the church intended. Again, this church was developed during the tail-end of the Great Migration. The image of God is to look like his Son and share in his character of love and peace. Therefore, the focus on building the community keeps the church grounded on what our pioneers and Christ intended. Redeveloping the communal spirit of the church will allow us to expand our reach in love and build disciples for Christ, thus moving us to understand that we have been called to “be” and not “have.”

Moreover, building the communal aspect of the church could help one of the weaknesses of the church. It has been said in jest that it takes money to do ministry. I have found this to be true. Ministry is not easy, and for a church that has had its fair share of financial dilemmas, it has been challenging to “do more.” Right now, the church's focus is mainly on upkeep and staffing. By far, this is a dangerous practice however it is the plight of most churches. The dangerousness of this practice is that it could lead to a dying or fruitless congregation.

In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, Thom Rainer states, “The pattern was one where funds were used more to keep the machinery of the church moving, and to keep the members happy, than funding the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The money, though, was symptomatic of a heart problem. The church

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Gaining the Things That Money Can't Buy*, 2nd ed., (Colorado Springs, CO: C, 2009), 138.

cared more for its own needs than the community and the world.”³ Now with this being stated, I understand Rainer’s premise. His conjecture is based on churches that did this by force, meaning that their goal was to focus inwardly and not outwardly. Moreover, there are still some “Rich Young Ruler” churches among us.

However, what do we say in the case of the church that they have no choice? I believe in looking at our church; our financial place was not by choice but by circumstance. Again, one of the struggles for the community in the Fort Wayne area is the numerous churches in the city. There are at least seventy-five and counting Protestant African American churches in the Fort Wayne metropolitan area. However, there are only about 40,000 African American people in the city. By the time one adds in the number of Caucasian churches, minus the persons who are either agnostic, atheist, or of another faith, there are very few people that a church could build or let alone rebuild from. It becomes a cycle of reshuffling persons from one building to another.

This has become an issue not only for the church but for others as well. For some, the extensive enumeration of churches in a city of less than one million makes no sense. Again, it seems we are reshuffling persons, and no church can get some level of traction, thus straining churches financially that seek to do more but cannot be due to the lack of funds. I have learned from my context that ministry takes resources and in a situation in which resources are lacking growth will be tough or simply impossible.

³ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 36.

Ministry Journey

In the reflectiveness of the autobiography assignment, I was able to see God's hand at work in my life through my journey from its beginning up until now. Writing that essay became therapeutic and came at a time in which I needed to hear what God did for me, even from my own words. Again, throughout the paper, the "golden thread" was the fact that God works miracles. Nonetheless, without sounding "preachy" or redundant, God is able and worthy to be praised. Looking at what God did for me, I understand more now that I am a recipient of his grace.

I have been keenly aware of God's grace in my life. I now see why people get excited about singing that hymn of the church. Regardless of color, age, or stage, Amazing Grace still resonates in the hearts of Christians worldwide. For example, Susan Quindag stated her reasoning when hearing the song by saying, "For some reason, I liked it. At the time I didn't know what it meant but it sounded like peace."⁴ Nevertheless, for me, God's grace has simply been amazing.

However, to get to this stage in my life and understand what God has done, one cannot simply place it on the fact that miracles transpired. Yes, God opens doors, but how and why? After writing about my ministry journey, I was able to see the doors that had opened. But what was God's overarching plan to get me to see how and why the doors fit into the cadence of my ministry? Therefore, my seminary experience was necessary. My experiences in seminary helped develop a skill set in which you are shaped to view what God is trying to do. In Matthew 1, with the birth of Jesus, God is not just bringing a baby into the world. He is sending a savior. Moreover, as I reflect upon each juncture of

⁴ Susan Quindag, "In like Manner of 'Amazing Grace': A Christian's Journey for Relationship and the Sound of Spirituality," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (November 3, 2022): 1054, 2.

my life, God is trying to show me that he is at work through me and the people in my life. From birth until now, God's miraculous work was evident, and he did it through the people he placed in my community.

For me, community is one of the best ways to describe who I am as a person. Now, yes, I am and have always been a person who enjoys their personal space. I have never minded having “my time,” and as I become older, I understand the necessity of rest and personal Sabbath. However, I understood from an early age that community was important. Now mind you, I grew up before the evolution of social media. I grew up in a time when we still sat and ate together as a family. Things like Vacation Bible School and Sunday School were paramount. Moreover, we even still went to the movies. I was in the last era of embracing community. We not only had and possessed a common bond but we were family. No wonder Robert M. Franklin states, “Black families are typically extended families rather than simply nuclear families, a family pattern that has helped African Americans survive amidst difficult and uncertain social conditions.”⁵

My community or family has consisted of several persons. My parents, my wife, children, some mentors, and friends have stayed the course while others were there temporarily, but God uniquely used them all to be a conduit of the blessings that God had prepared for me. Gary Chapman, in his book entitled *Love as a Way of Life*, states, “You are a person with multiple relationships. Those relationships include neighbors, coworkers, children, a spouse, parents, siblings, and friends.”⁶ The dangerous part of a

⁵ Robert Michael Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 54.

⁶ Gary Chapman, *Love as a Way of Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2008), under “121,” Amazon Kindle.

Christian life is when we forget this. Too many times, we feel that we have to go through it alone. Or that there is no one around who understands. However, like Elijah was under the juniper tree, we must be reminded that we are not the only ones in the faith.

My relationship with my wife has taught me that I am not alone. My new relationship with my father, as two who are both now pastors and have shared experiences, also reaffirms that I am not alone. My relationship with mentors and even my church context were all intentional in helping me see that I am not alone. God works through people. Not only does God work through people, but God also builds through relationships. My ministry would not be where it is today, and as a matter of fact, I could not be where I am today by forging through life thinking that I can make it on my own. It took a community of people pouring into me to help me develop into what God has for me.

Too often, pastors and leaders believe they are all they need. Grant it; this thinking comes from the hurt of trusting or placing confidence in the wrong people. Serving people can be challenging. Primarily serving a church context. Pastors are most successful when they understand that they are not alone. However, they are also more successful when they utilize the talents of those in the community that they serve, which has been my personal experience. As I learned to embrace my surrounding community, I grew and excelled. In my community, no one was the same but had similar values, but this is the same for the church. Jonathan Leeman states: “The Word’s electric, Spirit-filled vibrations function like a magnet, which causes a thousand individual shards of metal to gather and amass.”⁷

⁷ Jonathan Leeman, *Word-Centered Church: How Scripture Brings Life and Growth to God's People* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017), 87,

We are a group of people with different backgrounds and different experiences, but we believe in the same Savior and his redemptive work. I believe one of the most damaging texts in the Bible is Jonah's refusal to embrace community. He goes out of his way not to reach out to those whom God was trying to embrace. This thinking places him in a wrong place with God, and until he is open to a sense of God, God will not release him. Maybe this was the same for me. Before this time of reflection, I thought that I was all that I needed. But God, even throughout the Old Testament, didn't just work through one person. God always had supporting actors, those who came along to help in times of need. Moses had Aaron. David had Jonathan. Esther had Mordechai. James had John. Even at the end of life, Paul reached out to John Mark.

God had to show me that I can work through you, but I also work through other people. Now, by understanding that, I have a better appreciation for the plan of God. enabling me to understand my role in ministry and how ministry really works. I was convinced for some time that just seeing the pastor on Sunday morning giving the message was it. Yet, it takes a cadre of persons who have embraced the kingdom agenda to come together to glorify God. That is how it all works out and comes together.

Now, in my journey, I can even conclude that there were times that my community negatively impacted me. I came to discover that just because I had a community of family and friends, it did not mean that I was absolved from traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, it also did not mean that I was absolved from traumatic experiences that were due to my community or because of my community. Just like Moses had to deal with the jealousy of Aaron and Miriam, David the sins of his children,

and Joseph, and the malicious behavior of his brothers, I too dealt with my fair share of trauma from my community.

As a child, the most traumatic was that of losing my grandfather. My grandfather, Rev. J.A. Rucker, was the patriarch of my maternal family. Every day after school, my brother and I were there with him and my grandmother. Next to my father, my grandfather was the next important man in my life. I remember this decline as if it was yesterday. In April of 2000, he received the news that he was diagnosed with cancer, and by August of that year, he passed away. As a child, I could not pull myself to see in him in his last days. The time was simply unbearable. Watching him fade away and my mother mourn her father proved to be very traumatic. I can even remember sitting at the stairs of our basement, listening to my mother weep while she wrote her father's obituary.

Not only was that a traumatic experience, but then I experienced my fair share of trauma as a young preacher trying to find his way. At times in my ministry journey, I anticipated more from those in my community. I found this to be prevalent during my college years in ministry. It was a season where I was trying to find myself and understand where I fit in. There were moments when I expected those in my community to tell me where to go, what to do, and how to be. I remember vividly how, in college, I fit but didn't fit. There even though community was good, it was not enough. It is here that I found that faith cannot supersede fellowship. The role of community is not to replace the role and supremacy of Christ. When I believed the latter, that's when I found myself failing in ministry and falling away from Christ.

However, again, there were those in my community who were able to point me back in the right direction and helped me to see that even though we face traumatic

situations personally or as the by-product of our community, some are present that can point us in the right direction. In the death of my grandfather, my community showed me how to grieve appropriately. Through observation, I heard those in my church community let my mother know, “I will be that father for you.” I saw her and my family grieve with hope. The experience helped me to see that God is ever present with us and that even when our community is broken, He can regenerate us through others, especially through the power of His spirit.

From college, I found that it was okay to be me. By fellowshiping with like-minded persons and believers, I was able to see that I was not alone. Others felt like I did but did not have a great way of expressing it. They also felt trapped, but as we bonded, we grew spiritually. God will send those your way who will help you get back on track in your faith journey. In getting back on track, I understood that I cannot put my faith in people, but God will place those in my life who are full of faith to give guidance, help, and direction.

Without this, my ministry journey would not have been where it is today. I now know more than ever the role of community in my livelihood. It has gotten me through some challenging and depressing moments where I felt I could not continue.

Nevertheless, I also learned as I was placed in this new area of ministry that my current community is designed to go both ways. Yes, God put those in my life to help me. Yet, God also desires me to do the same for someone else. Regardless of their background, who they are, their age, or even life experiences.

Dr. Tony Evans gives an idea of how this should be as he summarizes Jesus’ encounter with those from Samaria. He states, “One of the Bible’s greatest evangelistic

outreaches occurred simply because Jesus took the time to engage a person from another background other than his own.”⁸

Moving to Fort Wayne has pushed me here. Even though I knew the church and the church in Indiana, where I was born and raised, it became a culture shock to me. How people interact and respond is not what I am accustomed to. Moreover, at the end of the day, I am an introvert, unbeknownst to many. I don't fellowship well. I cannot easily make friends or even have conversations with others, which continues to be a struggle. However, as I began to reflect on those open to me and through understanding the biblical purpose of community, I find myself embracing it more now with others.

Synergy

Based on the information discovered through my context and ministry journey, the goal of my project will be the work of community in the life of the local church. The role of community or a communal focus is evident in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, we see the life of Ruth. As Ruth leaves her homeland of Moab, she finds a new sense of community in Bethlehem, which is vital for Ruth and all those who are connected to her, especially Naomi. We cannot forget what Ruth tells Naomi. So, she said, “See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there I will be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”

⁸ Tony Evans, *Kingdom Agenda: Living Life God's Way* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2013), 339.

However, not only does Ruth enter the community, but she is also embraced by the culture of the community as she enters the work of barley fields. Moreover, the joy of the communal experience is that she moves from an outsider of the grace of God to becoming a recipient of the grace of God. She also gets a deeper understanding of God. Dr. Ralph West states, “Ruth also learned in the fields that God is the owner of everything, and she was simply the manager.”⁹ She is now becoming equipped, and a disciple God will undoubtedly use for his glory.

As you can see, I have a passion for community. The church itself cannot only be an institution but a community. Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his book entitled *Authentic Christianity* states, “...Let me emphasize again that fellowship is not to be equated with institutionalism, and this, it seems to be, is the thing that is keeping many outside the Christian church at the present time.”¹⁰ However, if I were to push the claim further, this would place the church in a stagnant place of growth, numerically and spiritually. Just being glad that we have a building and taking care of it is not what we have been called to do. We have been called to enter fellowship with both God through faith and man through shared communion and works.

Thus, this is where our context needs strength—not just remembering what we did in the past or celebrating the present structure. But this is actual, real ministry. The first-century church understood this not only as how the church should function but also how society should exist. We should not be isolated in our own corners. Nor should we

⁹ Ralph Douglas West, *Finding Fullness Again: What the Book of Ruth Teaches Us About Starting Over* (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 68.

¹⁰ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Book of Acts*, u.s. ed., vol. v. 1, *Authentic Christianity* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2000), 137.

be aloof to our brothers and sisters around us. If we believe that God works through people, we should be willing to embrace one another, not just sit next to one another during a church service or business meeting. But we should allow the power of the spirit to flow through our lives daily.

Thinking about our church communities, the Church Covenant even reminds us that we, as the church, are to walk together in Christian love. This is a community, and this is what God intended. Again, I had to learn this for myself, and my experiences have led me to realize that I cannot exist apart from the community of faith. From Dr. Steve Simpson, who saved my life as a newborn, to Dr. Lloyd Hervey, who became my professor of education, it took community. Even in my walk with Christ, my parental influences and my grandparents' exposure is evident in the communal work.

In my marriage, I understand it takes both to be married and to stay married because marriage is a community. Community does take a lot, but it must be developed. It takes people, like my wife and I, willing to embrace another. We are not the same. We are not identical. Moreover, there are times when we do not see eye to eye. However, I learned through community that if we embrace one another as Christ intended, both persons can reap the benefit, and Christ can be exalted. In his book entitled, *The Kingdom Agenda*, Tony Evans states, "Our spiritual unity as Christians is as organic as the unity of the human body." Even looking at it from this approach, we see that no organ is alike. The heart cannot do what the brain can. Neither can the lungs do the work of the tongue, but when all work together, the body is able to achieve and succeed, and this is the essence of what the church must re-embrace.

In our context, we have issues of plateau attendance, too many churches in our community, and a lack of financial resources. Moreover, this is fertile ground to reestablish community connectivity even with all of this. Reestablishing this will help fortify the church. Moreover, it will bring us back to our roots, where we started over sixty years ago – a group of people built on community and eager to serve Christ. Now, this can be done by the church reaching out to a community it has forgotten called “the unchurched”.

I believe that now more than ever, “the unchurched” are looking to reconnect to the local church. In my opinion, this community, which consists of those who would be considered “backsliders,” “sinners,” or “outsiders,” have seen that the community called the world is no good. These persons have experienced traumatic episodes in their lives that have pushed them to the edge. Yes, they need the gospel, but to be receptive to it, they need people who will build relationships and community with them. Alvin Reed states that this community is called the “radically unchurched.” He states, “The radically unchurched are those who have no clear personal understanding of the message of the gospel, who have had little or no contact with Bible-teaching, Christ-honoring church.”¹¹

Nevertheless, this community has seen that the gang community cannot help them. The political community is not interested in them, and there is hostility even in their own communities of families and friends. Now, I believe they are ready and willing to try the church. Again, we give them gospel, but we also intentionally build community.

¹¹ Alvin L. Reid, *Radically Unchurched: Who They Are & How to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 21.

As Carlyle Fielding Stewart says, “No, we don’t change the message, but we can change how we disseminate the message.”¹² This form of evangelism will only make the local church better.

Through my role as pastor of our church context, it will be my task to give leadership and structure to how we will embrace this community. Persons need to be appropriately trained to reconnect with those who have not attended church, which is sometimes back into the fold. The hypothesized plan for the project is simple: it will focus on training church leaders to embrace this community.

This is important to our ministry focus because this is something people have never had to do so intentionally. When this church began in 1960, everyone went to church. There was no question about it. In learning about our church history, people already knew they were going to unite with this church when they moved north during the Great Migration because of the family connections and community before. However, these connections do not exist anymore. People don’t attend church like they used to in the past. But there is a crowd that wants to reengage the local church.

Yet this re-engagement is not easy. As Adam Hamilton states, “Many pastors and laypeople alike want to see their congregations grow. But despite their effort, results seem elusive”¹³. Yet even though it may be elusive, Hamilton does not say it is impossible. This project will show that it is possible to reconnect these persons back to

¹² Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Growing the African American Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 17.

¹³ Adam Hamilton, *Leading beyond the Walls: Developing Congregations with a Heart for the Unchurched* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 13.

the local church. Yes, we will explore why they left, but it is not essential to our process of winning them back. I believe it can happen for this church and all church communities.

Conclusion

Through my experiences, God works through people and is present in the community. In my opinion, this is what being a Christian is all about, embracing life with God as the author, focus, and where our faith resides. However, one cannot do this alone; it takes others around us to help us with that process. As mentioned before, this is what my life has been. God placed people strategically in my life, whether long-term or seasonal, to help me grow and develop as a person, man, son, husband, father, preacher, pastor, and even seminarian.

This was more than just mentorship or some instructional glance. No, these people came into my life and showed me a sense of community. Their impact has been and will always be far greater than what was ever imagined. But at the end of the day, this is what God has envisioned for all, as he saw that it was not suitable for Adam to be alone. God placed him in a sense of community, with one who was different but similar and connected with God and is the church's life. Moreover, in researching life in my context, this is what transpired.

Jerusalem was a community within a community. Even though it faced the racism of the '60s, it built a community that has withstood the last sixty years. Moreover, they overcame their share of trauma as well. They overcame church splits, fights, and even the passing of their pioneering pastor. They overcame it, namely through the power of Jesus Christ and the power of community.

The overall goal of this project is to bring that sense of community back and ultimately refocus the church to look like its surrounding community and Christ. There is no room anymore for churches that are closed off and closed-minded. Our doctrine does not change, but our doors should remain open to physical, literal, and spiritual maturation. Not having a communal formation is contrary to the role and make-up of the local church. Moreover, this is what the world suggests we become. The world suggests we become disjointed and unconnected. In contrast, Christ came to bring us back together to the Father.

Yes, Paul is confirming church dogma or tenet in his statement in 2 Corinthians that; "...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." But we must note what Paul is saying: God was reconciling the world, not a person but the world. He sent his Son to save us all. Therefore, if God sent his Son to save us all, then we must be willing to embrace all. This is paramount to our lives as Christians.

The essence of who we are is community, and this is the project's goal. It is the backbone of what we are supposed to be and how the church can navigate the uncertain days of tomorrow. In the end, this project is designed to show that as the church reimagines the culture of community to the body, it will increase church attendance and stewardship, serve as a model for evangelism, and help develop discipleship.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The basis of our journey is that there is a disconnect from those who are followers of Christ. They are adamant that they believe He is the Savior, Lord, and King. Nevertheless, some traumatic experiences have wounded them, and they are not a part of the local church. As Madipoane Masenya states, “It [the book of Ruth] has been read as a narrative which reveals the cooperation of two women in an unfriendly and empty environment.”¹⁴ These experiences can range from church fights, divorce, loss of a loved one, and even personal failure. In perusing through the word of God, several stories can help us in our problem statement. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, I was led to the story of Naomi, which is found in Ruth 1:6-18.

Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth deal with being wounded by life’s circumstances. One author stated, “Naomi’s story parallel’s Job’s. Blow after blow has devastated her life.”¹⁵ First, Naomi lost her husband, Elimelech, and is living in the foreign land of Moab due to famine in the land of her youth, Bethlehem-Judaea. Secondly, Ruth has experienced her share of problems as well, as her husband, who was a

¹⁴ Madipoane Masenya, “Is Ruth the ‘eset Hayyil’ for Real? : An Exploration of Womanhood from African Proverbs to the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3:1-13),” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36 (July 2010): 253.

¹⁵ John Goldingay, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 146.

son of Naomi, has died. As life unfolds, God opens a wide door and blesses the land of Naomi's youth.

Naomi makes the decision to return home, and Ruth decides to stay with Naomi. This decision, even though not understood or appreciated by Naomi initially, is the first step in Naomi's rehabilitation. She is bitter at their return to Bethlehem, but as she welcomes Ruth into her family, she ends the overall discourse blessed. I believe that blessings result from Naomi allowing God to work through her companionship with Ruth.

As Ruth and Naomi sojourn together, the story informs us that Ruth has become the center of attention for a man named Boaz. Boaz, Naomi's kinsman, can help carry on with Naomi's family without her husband and sons. Through the story, we see how Ruth and Naomi lean on one another to move from their bitterness, which could not have happened had Ruth acquiesced to Naomi's prodding for her to leave as her other sister-in-law, Orpah, did. Ruth's willingness to stay and Naomi's willingness to allow her is a blessing for both.

Unknowingly to her, Ruth has become an evangelist for Naomi. Naomi whose life's circumstances have wounded is now strengthened by the communal bond between her and her daughter-in-law. Because of this bond, I believe Naomi stays connected with God and keeps her relationship with him intact. If Ruth does not do this, we may not see or hear from Naomi again. We must accept this is the case for the local church.

Many have found themselves like Naomi in a "bitter" place. As we mentioned before, these moments of bitterness can result from various issues. Yet the worst result of the matter is that one can become despondent. This despondency can lead to a break in

one's connection with Christ and his church. Even though Naomi contends that God is moving in Bethlehem, staying in this state could have driven her away from a relationship with Him. Moreover, in 2023, we see many, due to hardship, connected with God and not with the local church, which is a paradoxical place.

It behooves us to realize this is not God's plan. Even as Satan would tempt Simon Peter according to Luke 22, he is still urged by Christ to remember his brothers and stay connected with his brothers. Even from the beginning of time, with creation in Genesis 2, God saw fit in that we were not to be alone. We must have community. Persons must see that reconnecting with the local church is pertinent and necessary for their faith. However, we cannot expect them to do it alone or naturally. Ruth shows us that we can evangelize those weary and reach them through the power of community. We will discover how God can bless us through the presence of other people and companionship. Moreover, as we reestablish or establish a sense of community, our family, fellow preachers, and friends, too, can find Naomi's blessing. We can see that God does work things out for our good.

Historical/Social Context

The authorship of the book of Ruth is unknown. However, some attribute it to the prophet, priest, and judge, Samuel. Katherine Sakenfeld in her commentary on Ruth, suggests the following about its authorship: "Jewish tradition attributed the book to the prophet Samuel."¹⁶ This assumption helps us to understand the historical era of this writing. Clearly, we understand that all biblical writings are not written "in time" and are

¹⁶ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1999), 5.

stories that God's people have preserved. Nonetheless, understanding that its writer is Samuel gives us credence to understand the book.

Therefore, we can understand that the book of Ruth takes place after the time of Moses but before the time of David. More accurately, it is during the period of tribal conquest. During this time, judges such as Ehud, Samson, Deborah, and Barak ruled. During this time in the history of the people of God, they had an unsteady relationship with God. We must take into consideration the scripture in Judges 2:10-12 which states:

¹⁰ That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the LORD or the works He had done for Israel. ¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals ¹² and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD."¹⁷

One writer stated, "As the previous generation absolutely knew the Lord and served him faithfully, so the present generation absolutely departed from that faithful relationship."¹⁸

The departing of the relationship was more than just a severance of friendship or dissolution of marriage. However, it was breaking a covenantal agreement between God and man. To understand this, we must go back further and examine the words Moses gave to the people of God. Moses, their leader from the Exodus and their wilderness experience, understands first-hand what happens when a person doesn't follow God by faith. At the end of his life, Moses dedicates an entire sermon, the book of Deuteronomy, to ensuring that the people of God keep their covenant relationship with God intact.

¹⁷ Biblical citations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted, Judges 2:10-12.

¹⁸ J Gordon Harris, Cheryl Anne Brown, and Michael S. Moore, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 156.

This truth leads us back to God's relationship or covenant agreement with Moses. Before his transition from life to death, Moses reminded the children of God what God required of them. Deuteronomy 28:1-2 states, “Now if you faithfully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all His commands, I am giving you today, the Lord your God will put you far above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come and overtake you because you obey the Lord your God.”

The covenant agreement that Moses discloses is based on their attempt to stick with God. I believe God, Moses, and the people understood that God was not looking for a 100% unblemished record. Thus, there would be no need for goats, bulls, oxen, and lambs to be used for sacrificial purposes. Nonetheless, when we read Judges, there is the theological exaggeration that they ultimately walked away from their covenant relationship with God. We must remember that the covenantal relationship was the binding agreement for the entire community. Patrick Miller states in his commentary on Deuteronomy, “The detailing of the consequences of obedience and disobedience are a sharp reminder of the interrelationship of the individual and community. The divine instruction is set to show the people how to live together as the people of God.”¹⁹

This covenantal relationship came with blessings, but it also came with consequences. As the presumed writer of this text, Samuel would state to King Saul for his disobedience in 1 Samuel 15:22; “Then Samuel said: Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.” Moses outlined what exactly would take place if they did not follow God. Moses begins in Deuteronomy 28:15 with

¹⁹ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville, KY: J. Knox Press, 2012), 197.

what God declares; “But if you do not obey the LORD your God by carefully following all His commands and statutes, I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overtake you.” One of the curses mentioned is that of drought, found in verse 22.

This is where we pick up our text historically. Naomi, one of our main characters, is in Bethlehem during a drought. The drought brings a change in Naomi's life. At first, she is in Bethlehem with her husband Elimelech and children, Mahlon and Chileon. However, they moved to a neighboring place in Moab due to the need for food. One author helps us to understand this move further because of the way the world was at that time. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, in her commentary, states, “Most families in the biblical period lived in an agrarian society (an estimated 90 percent) where land was the main source of economic security...”²⁰ Therefore the family’s decision is necessary for survival, and it helps us to understand where our characters reside in the heart of the text.

Canonical Context

Ruth’s place in the bible is secure and, as mentioned before, serves as a bridge for the Old Testament story and the bible. As all scripture points toward Jesus Christ or life in the Spirit after Christ, Ruth's portrait is necessary to clarify this picture. Judy Fentress-Williams, in her commentary, states; “The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, places Ruth after the book of Judges, strengthening its connection to the

²⁰ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth =: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2011), xxvi.

Davidic monarchy. The book begins “in the days that the Judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1) and ends with the words “and Jesse [the father] of David” (Ruth 4:22).”²¹

Ruth’s addition to the biblical text introduces several themes that help in the biblical story. One of those themes is *hesed* or *chesed*. Miles Custis states, “Hesed is a power word in the Bible and the most important word in the book of Ruth.”²² Rabbi Rami Shapiro states that *chesed* or *hesed* is “often translated into English as “love” or “lovingkindness”²³. However, Shapiro takes this a step forward to believe that *hesed* or *chesed* is more than just God’s love but also God’s grace.

He stated, “I define (*hesed/chesed*) as God’s unlimited, unconditional, unconditioned, and all-inclusive love for all creation.”²⁴ For Shapiro, his suggestion that God’s *hesed* or *chesed* is unconditional points us to Ruth’s story. Shapiro states, “To say that God’s grace is unconditional is to say that there is nothing one can do to merit grace, earn grace, or even avoid grace.”²⁵

Ruth’s story is central to this. One who is considered an outsider is bestowed God’s love and grace. She does nothing to earn or merit it; it is freely given. Ruth’s inclusion into the holy writ expands the story of the bible that God’s love and grace are for all persons. The Apostle Paul informs us of this in Ephesians 2. At first glance, he

²¹ Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), page unknown <https://www.ministrymatters.com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/reader/9781426758461/#copyright.html>.

²² Carolyn James-Custis, *Finding God in the Margins: The Book of Ruth* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 5.

²³ Rami M. Shapiro, *Amazing Chesed: Living a Grace-Filled Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013), ix.

²⁴ Shapiro, ix.

²⁵ Shapiro, ix.

states that our salvation is simply a gift of grace. Ephesians 2:8 states; For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast. Yet he goes on to show the unconditionality of grace as he states in verses 11-13;

So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.

Undoubtedly, this is where Ruth's story comes to light. The hesed/chesed of God became part of Christ's “genetic code”. One writer suggests, “Hesed seems to be part of David's DNA. His great-grandmother, the compassionate Moabite widow, was a paradigm of hesed. She selflessly gave her life to her mother-in-law Naomi. Their genetic loving-kindness would eventually be passed down to Jesus.”²⁶

Finally, we cannot forget Ruth's origin. She is not from any tribe of Jacob or of the line Abraham. She is from Moab and is essential to the entire plan of the holy bible. As we are aware of the covenant between God and Abraham in Genesis 12, we see that God is establishing his people through Abraham and opening the door for all nations to be blessed. It is God's plan that all persons, whether Jew or Gentile, be a part of his family. What better way to show the continuation of the covenant than this story of a Moabite widow who will eventually become the great-grandmother of King David and consequentially intimate the lineage of Jesus Christ?

²⁶ Michael Card, *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God's Lovingkindness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 63,

Detailed Analysis

By the location of our pericope, we have come to realize that life has dealt a major blow to our characters. We are given three characters at this time of the text. According to verse one, the first is Naomi, who has been removed from her homeland. She lost her husband in verse three, and by verse five, which the bible shows has been ten years since they arrived in Moab, she has lost her two sons. For Naomi, everything is not totally lost because she still has her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Moreover, we also see at this time of the pericope that there has been word that God has revisited her homeland. According to verse 6, the bible states, “She and her daughters-in-law prepared to leave the land of Moab because she had heard in Moab that the LORD had paid attention to His people’s need by providing them food.”

It seems as if, mid-way through the trip, Naomi decides it would be best for the women to separate. According to verses eight and nine, she believes it would be best for the women to find new husbands. The writer offers the word “security” in the Holman Christian Standard Bible. According to the original text, it is transliterated to mean *menuchah* in the Hebrew to suggest “a resting place”.²⁷ It seems as if Naomi understands that she cannot provide a particular lifestyle or comfort to her daughters-in-law. Again, as we see before our pericope, one decides to return to Moab in the person of Orpah; this is seen in verse fourteen.

²⁷ “H4496 - מְנוּחָה - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV),” Blue Letter Bible, accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4496/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

Before we assume Orpah's decision, we must remember in verse ten that both women, Ruth and Orpah, are content with remaining with Naomi. However, Naomi gives them excuses, albeit valid and understandable, on why they should return to Moab. In all of this, we see Naomi's bitterness and disdain, which is capitulated by verse thirteen which reads; "...No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD's hand has turned against me." In his commentary, Thomas Fuller suggests that Naomi's grief is intensified in the thought of her daughter-in-law's joining her. He states, "This is as if she had said, it grieves me much that you are already plunged into poverty; but it would add more to my sorrow if you should increase your calamities by returning home with me."²⁸ Naomi clearly does not wish for her daughters-in-law to experience any additional hardship than the case of already being widowed, and she implores them to return to Moab.

According to the Holman Christian Standard rendering of verse sixteen, the writer uses the word "persuade" as Ruth's response to Naomi. According to the Hebrew, it is the word which is transliterated to "*paga*"²⁹ which means "to meet" or to "encounter." Further understanding of the word is to "make supplication." Naomi makes her case to Ruth and Orpah but pleads with them to return to Moab. According to the text, Naomi gives them valid reasons outside of her bitterness with God that they should return to Moab. In his article entitled *The Art of Persuasion and the Book of Ruth*, Matthew Michael states, "Naomi gradually but inexorably makes it clear that it would make no

²⁸ N Scott Amos, ed., *Reformation Commentary On Scripture. Old Testament*, vol. 4, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 475.

²⁹ "H6293 - Pāḡa' - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6293/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

sense whatsoever for Ruth and Orpah to stay with her. From this perspective, she uses rhetorical questions to persuade them through appeal to their rationality.”³⁰

Michael, as with Fuller, brings into the play the “hand of God” in the matter we see in verse 13. Michael states, “The underlying reasoning is that “Naomi cannot encourage “the two Moabite women to continue with her on the journey because God has now become “her enemy.”³¹ We cannot move too quickly past this ideology. Naomi believes that God has dealt bitterly with her and her family. With the loss of her husband and two sons, she is widowed and sociologically and politically barren, and she believes that the culprit of it all is God. One writer stated, “The loss of men in her life caused Naomi great bitterness...One thing for sure is that she was bitter against Yahweh. Whatever poverty/emptiness she has experienced, be it through death, family, emotional turmoil, she attributed to God.”³²

This is evident in verse 13, as we examine the name of God that Naomi utilizes. Later, in the pericope, Ruth uses the name Elohim, yet in her current mental, spiritual, and social state, Naomi invokes the name Yahweh. To understand this, we must look at Old Testament theology. Each name of God had a strong meaning, and Naomi's use of the name of Yahweh points to how she really felt. Robin Routledge helps one to understand the name of Yahweh according to ancient Hebrew culture and Old Testament theology. He states, “The explanation of the divine name (which [is] translated ‘I will be what I will be’) ...emphasizes that God can always be something new as new situations

³⁰ Matthew Michael, “The Art of Persuasion and the Book of Ruth: Literary Devices in the Persuasive Speeches of Ruth 1,” *Hebrew Studies* 56 (2015): 145-62.

³¹ Michael, 154.

³² Madipoane Masenya, “Struggling with Poverty/emptiness: Rereading the Naomi-Ruth Story in African-South Africa,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 120 (November 2004): 52.

require it and emphasizes God's commitment to his people and his power to act on their behalf is not limited by circumstances or location."³³ Because of this thought process of the people of God, we can assume that in some shape or form, Naomi believes that God is responsible for where she is in life. He is the culprit, and He is the target of her bitterness.

As the pericope moves to verse 14, we see that Orpah and Ruth have made the decision on what they should do. The text reads, "Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her." Orpah has decided to return to Moab. One commentary suggests that we should not denigrate Orpah for her decision. In her book *Gleanings from Ruth*, Jennifer Koosed states, "Both Ruth and Orpah decided to leave Moab and accompany Naomi to Bethlehem; both Ruth and Orpah resist Naomi's urging to return to their own mother's houses; both Ruth and Orpah weep. Any assessment of Orpah is unwarranted."

Regardless of our thoughts of Orpah, we can agree that both Naomi, Ruth and Orpah are dealing with a tough time not only for Naomi but also for daughters-in-law. However, as the pericope continues, we see that Ruth decides to stay with Naomi. Here, in verse fourteen, we see the response of Ruth as the scripture states: Again, they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. The Anchor Bible commentary suggests that "Ruth's clinging to Naomi may indicate a desire for continued kinship relationship or household affiliation despite Naomi's objections that she cannot

³³ Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 84

provide a husband for a daughter-in-law.”³⁴ For Ruth, she has counted the cost and decided to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem anyway.

Ruth could have gone back to Moab or chartered her new path, as did Orpah. Some suggest that this is a practical choice by Ruth and not some far-reaching or far-fetching incident. Helen Leneman, in her article entitled; “The Voice of Ruth and Naomi,” stated, “Ruth would have no opportunities for marriage in Moab, having been married to a foreigner and possibly being barren. Viewed in this way, Ruth’s act is not so much self-sacrifice as self-preservation.”³⁵ The scripture is not clear on that; however, it is clear on Ruth's decision to stay connected with Naomi during a trying time for both women.

Let us take notice of what Ruth says in the final part of the pericope; verses 16-17 read as follows:

But Ruth replied: Do not persuade me to leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May Yahweh punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.

Ruth is determined to go with Naomi. However, she is doing more than traveling alongside; she is seeking to immerse herself in the same community that Naomi has in Bethlehem. Again, as Dr. Renita Weem states, “Ruth and Naomi’s story is especially refreshing because it is a story of friendship between a woman and her grieving mother-in-law. Their friendship is a welcome contrast to the numerous other stories in the Bible

³⁴ Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 98.

³⁵ Helen Leneman, “The Voices of Ruth and Naomi: Cultural Transformation through Librettos and Music,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 35, no. 2 (Autumn 2002): 13-25.

which portray women competing against one another for status, power and men: Hagar and Sarah, Rachel and Leah, Miriam and her sister-in-law.”³⁶

Ruth has made the choice to dismiss her culture and assimilate into Naomi’s. As one writer stated, “Ruth pledges as if she could carry it out – that not even death will come between them. Unlike Naomi’s, her [Ruth’s] words are not about marriage, not about theology, not about strategy, but only about presence.”³⁷ From what we see in the pericope, Ruth has no idea what awaits her in Bethlehem, but she is certain of two things. The first is her view of Naomi’s God. Even though Naomi speaks of God in the name of Yahweh in a negative sense, Ruth speaks of God in a positive sense. She believes in the God of Naomi and accepts Him as her God. She has now decided to develop a new community with Naomi and her people. As one writer states, “Her commitment to Naomi transcends even the bonds of racial origin and national religion: Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God will henceforth be hers.”³⁸

Ruth as a Tool for Community Evangelism and Reconnection

As we have examined the scripture pericope, Ruth and Naomi’s reestablishment of community in Bethlehem helps both during a time of bitterness, anxiety, and separation. As they have both dealt with loss, marginalization, fear, and even the unknown, their recommitment to one another helps them to enter a new beginning. As Dr. Renita Weems stated, “The story is...about faithfulness, devotion, commitment and

³⁶ Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 33.

³⁷ Patricia K. Tull, *Esther and Ruth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 56.

³⁸ Frederic Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth-esther*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 9:1.

stubborn loyalty, the stuff good relationships are made of.”³⁹ We must remember that Naomi and Ruth are hurt. One author stated, “She [Naomi] has experienced major personal tragedies, so much so that she feels ‘empty’.”⁴⁰ Now, one might ask where God is in the mix of this. I believe that it is in God's plan for family to be family. There, as we follow the will of God, He will order our footsteps. It is not Ruth, Naomi, or even Boaz in control. It is God who blesses this family through his sovereignty and providential care. We can see this in Ruth 4:14-15 as the community rejoices with Naomi. The scripture states, ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel. ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

We must pay attention to what is said in the scripture lesson here, which alludes to the value of Ruth to Naomi. The community suggests that Ruth is more valuable to Naomi than “seven sons”. One theologian suggests that this is “A strong statement about the value of Ruth. Sons were more valuable because the inheritance and family name was passed through the male heir.”⁴¹ Another states, “She who was empty (1:21) because she had no husband or sons has had her life “restored,” not through men, but through her daughter-in-law who loves her and who is more to her than seven sons (4:15).”⁴²

³⁹ Weems, 24.

⁴⁰ Peter H.W. Lau and Gregory Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 105.

⁴¹ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ru 4:15.

⁴² Gerald West, “Ruth,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 211.

As Anne Graham-Lotz states, “Wounds have a way of festering.”⁴³ If we are not careful, our bitterness can boil over.” The local church must come to grips with the fact that many in its community are dealing with some form or level of trauma. Trauma that is seen in the book of the Ruth is just as real in our local congregations. We have persons who have been widowed, orphaned, hurt, and maligned. We have persons who still feel the sting of grief, divorce, loss of income, and several other areas of traumatic experience. However, this story of Ruth and Naomi gives us a possible answer. Even though Naomi did not see it yet, allowing Ruth to sojourn with her was the best thing that happened in her life. I believe this is a post-modern approach to evangelism.

For many years, we have looked at evangelism to grow the local church. We have gone door-to-door to witness to persons with tracks and other material. Now, I am not arguing that the church should abandon these practices. However, I believe that Ruth also shows another practice of evangelism that helps reconnect those who have been hurt by life back to the kingdom of God and the local church. In the book, “Trauma-Informed Evangelism: Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers,” the writer states, “Most of our neighbors who were not Christians nevertheless had experiences with religion. Many of them, in fact, were formerly Christians but had rejected it for one reason or another. One common reason—a reason that would take more than ten years for me to begin to understand more fully—was spiritual abuse and trauma.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Anne Graham Lotz, *Wounded by God's People: Discovering How God's Love Heals Our Hearts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 109.

⁴⁴ Charles Kiser and Elaine A. Heath, *Trauma-Informed Evangelism: Cultivating Communities of Wounded Healers* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 11.

We will inevitably deal with life's bitterness. Especially in this season of COVID-19 and pure evilness in the world, we are being tried and tested like never before. As a matter of fact, John 15 touts this would be the case. There will be times of dismay. However, we cannot sit back and allow those who are "Naomi" to fester in their pain. Ruth sees an opportunity to journey with Naomi. We need those in our lives who say, your God will be my God. We need partners in ministry who will walk alongside us to remind us that it is okay to hurt and be angry, even if that anger is pointed toward Heaven.

In looking Kiser's example of trauma-informed evangelism we can see this paradigm is evident between Ruth and Naomi. Kiser states, "Evangelism among those with spiritual trauma must begin, therefore, by acknowledging the trauma and creating conditions and environment in which it can be healed."⁴⁵ Now it is my belief that this is organically done by Ruth as we see that she has experienced the same trauma as Naomi. Therefore, Kiser further states, "To be an empathetic witness is to walk with a survivor through three stages of recovery: (1) establishing safety, (2) telling the story of the trauma, and (3) reconnecting with life."⁴⁶

First, we see that Ruth establishes safety. For Kiser, this simply means building a relationship of trust. Notice how she does this in the text: she stays with Naomi. As we examined earlier, Orpah leaves, but Ruth clings to Naomi. Through this we can infer that this could have made Naomi feel safe or even at peace. The more they walked to Bethlehem, the more she felt encouraged by Ruth's presence. Even so, as they make it to

⁴⁵ Kiser, 166-167.

⁴⁶ Kiser, 176.

Bethlehem, she has now taken Ruth under her wing and coached her on how to make a relationship with Boaz work, which could not have happened if Ruth had not used this evangelism tool well. Hence, this begs us to ask ourselves the question, as the local church, if others feel safe enough to allow us to enter their hearts as they deal with the aftermath of trauma.

Second, we see the telling of the story. I must admit, this is not readily seen in the text. But with an imaginative hermeneutic, what else transpired on the way to Bethlehem? They must have talked. We will explore this later in another section, but when did we as church leaders move to this silent piety wherewith, we cannot have discussions? Abraham talked with God. Moses talked with Jethro. David talked with Jonathan. Moreover, Ruth talked with Naomi.

Finally, we see that Ruth reconnects Naomi to life. Ruth would not allow Naomi to give up. Positioning herself in Naomi's life was a springboard that enabled Naomi to live on. As mentioned, Naomi enters Bethlehem with despondency but becomes victorious, but this does not happen alone or through osmosis. It happens through the power of God and Ruth operating through that power. This can be the same for the local church. We can reconnect those struggling with trauma to the abundant life mentioned in John 10 through the power of Jesus Christ. When complete, those who were hurting just like Naomi can have found a new joy, hope, and sustainability through Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In compiling information and evidence for the historical foundation portion of this project, I could not help but find a correlation between my culture and the biblical culture that was presented. Our biblical narrative presented is the story of Ruth and Naomi. These two sisters defied the odds, trusted God, and pressed forward in faith regardless of societal norms. Looking at my culture, I could not help but think of a person like my grandmother, Mother Anne Culver, who was a servant-leader in our local church. My grandmother grew up in the South during the time of Jim Crow, racism, and marginalization. Yet, she came from a lineage of women who believed in God and took God at His word. Furthermore, they were faithful to the local church's ministry, and my grandmother was the epitome of faithfulness until her health failed and the Lord called her home.

Therefore, as I see the correlation between my cultural context and the biblical narrative, the following questions emanated: where did this happen historically? Where did people like my grandmother, her mother, and her grandmother garner the unmitigated will to persevere? For the sake of this project, we will take a historical look at the role of African American women missionary societies from the 16th to 19th century. During these times, we see that enslaved Africans were brought to America or the New World. We

will examine how, as this took place, women played a vital role in executing the local church's mission and uplifting the local society through service.

In examining this, we will begin with an overall view of the women in the African American community. We will examine how African American women served as viable pillars of the black community. Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, female cousins, etc., have played a vital role in the maturation of the black family. They are necessary for its growth, development, and care. We also will look at the role of women in the African American or Black church. Just as women were and still are vital to the Black family; the same is true for the Black church. Please be aware we will primarily examine this from a “Baptist” lens. Still, we will give credence to other Protestant denominations as well as Black Catholics who played a vital role in the antebellum South.

Then, we will look at different African American missionaries and missionary societies. We will attempt to demonstrate their role in the community for spiritual and secular guidance. We will show how they were able, even in the face of adversity, to build their missionary societies for the furtherance of our race. We will also show how predominantly white missionary societies utilize them to help carry out the local church's work. Finally, we will correlate how the missionary societies of the 16th through the 19th centuries parallel our biblical foundation and our overall project. As these groups worked together in community, it is a mirror image of the needs of the pastoral leadership and the life of Ruth and Naomi in our biblical text.

Role of Women in the African American Community

As researchers, one of our primary goals is to dismiss all bias. Whether cultural, personal, or experimental, bias can skew results to lean to favor intrinsic perspectives. Unfortunately, as I began researching this topic, I admittedly allowed my bias to take root. There is nothing, in my honest opinion, like the black family. John Hope Franklin stated, “The family is one of the strongest and most traditions in the black community.”⁴⁷ This was before our arrival as enslaved people in Point Comfort, Virginia. Our core DNA as people has been rooted in the fact that “family” matters.

Family was and still is the center of what we do and who we are. For African Americans, “family” is more than what is described in the Merriam-Webster’s dictionary as “a group of people who are related to each other” or “the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children”.⁴⁸ Family is not just who we are, but it is what we do. It has been essential to our foundation, and it is vital to our forwarding progress. Many can remember how they were able to find peace, solace, and love through their family unit.

Now, as the goal for us to examine the role of African American women's missionary societies and movements from 1600 to the late 1800’s, the best place to begin is with the family unit. We must remember that as Africans made it to the “New World,” their captors understood the essence of family and did their best to break the bonds of family. One author stated, “During slavery, African Americans had no legal means of

⁴⁷ Harriette Pipes McAdoo, *Black Families*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 2007), 3.

⁴⁸ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Family,” accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/family>.

creating family.”⁴⁹ In all honesty, we were not allowed to have “real” marriages. Hence the terms created, such as “jumping the broom”. A family could be separated or sold at a moment’s notice or even without notice. Therefore “family” in the African/African American connotation is more than just a person who was raising their children or even those who were living together under one roof. One author stated, “...many African American children live in a “family” that is not composed of either biological or legal ties”.⁵⁰ For the African/African American community, family became those who were at your school, church, down the block, or maybe across town.

Now, one of the foundational items of the family unit was two people, the patriarch or matriarch. The patriarch was the leading male or oldest male of the family. Moreover, there are many stories and articles that have been written on the role of the African American male. However, this document focuses on the role of African American women the matriarchal influence on our culture. Some may see a divide in patriarchal and matriarchal roles. Even as we look at the biblical texts of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, there was a clear role for Adam and a clear role for Eve. However, even though matriarchs were submissive in nature, their role in making the African American community was vital to the success of the community, the family, and the individual. In the book *Women of Color in U.S. Society*, Cheryl Gilkes states, “Within the slave community, women not only played key roles in the development of family, education,

⁴⁹ McAdoo, 3.

⁵⁰ Angela Hattery and Earl Smith, *African American Families* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 14.

and religion but also developed a women's network that was a foundation of strength, leaders and mutual aid."⁵¹

These key roles were more than just being a consoling presence or a domestic. Yet, African/African American women have had a rich history of building the local community as educators, midwives, day laborers, lawyers, abolitionists, financial consultants, and even ministers. Even though to this day, they have had their share of struggles. There cannot be an African American community without black women. They have been and still are essential to the work of our homes, communities, and the fabric of our lives.

Role of Women in the African American Church

As we ascribed in the previous section, African American women have played a vital role in society. With countless persons to choose from, such as Oprah Winfrey, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and others, the presence of African American women is noted, appreciated, and needed. Nonetheless, we must also agree to the presence and role of African American women in propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the book, *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, one author stated, "Women also gave the first testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵² We are well aware of women who were used by God for his glory. The most famous being Mary, the mother of Jesus, but let us not forget persons such as Ruth, Naomi, Salome,

⁵¹ Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, eds., *Women of Color in U.S. Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 235.

⁵² Paul Wesley Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 94.

Phoebe, Lydia, Priscilla, and others who were critical to the entire plan of God and furtherance of our faith. The writer goes on to suggest the following about the role of women in our faith.

In the home, ministering in the house churches, maintaining a steadfast witness, willingly being martyred for their faith, writing and teaching the truths of the gospel embodying the love of Christ in their practical humble deeds of charity and influencing people in many ways to abandon live sin and emptiness....women participated in the fulfilling of Great Commission⁵³

Now, as we understand the role of women in the Bible to help further the church's mission, we must also recognize the role of women in the formation of the local church.

Here in America, we can look back to the seventeenth century to see the influence of women in the local congregation. In her book *Righteous Content*, Daphne Wiggins gives credence to this historical framework as she states, “Female majority congregations in America were evident among New England Puritans even earlier, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century.”⁵⁴ In his book *Baptists in America*, Bill Leonard also states, “Women have shaped Baptist identity and practice since the Baptist movement began in the seventeenth century.”⁵⁵ Therefore, we can trace the role of women in the local church in America back to the 1600s.

Consequently, we can agree that the first arrival of enslaved people to American shores was around 1619. While others suggest, some may have arrived earlier than that. Nonetheless, as many Africans and later African Americans were colonized, they were brought into the local fellowships and religious traditions of their enslavers. Not to

⁵³ Chilcote, 100.

⁵⁴ Daphne Wiggins, *Righteous Content* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2005), 1.

⁵⁵ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 203.

mention that they brought with them their own customs as well. Needless to say, there must be correlations that African and later African American women were in and developed the majority of those considered to be “churched.”

Even though my scope in this section is limited to my Baptist tradition, we can also examine women and the fact that various other protestant and catholic traditions can come to the same conclusion. The conclusion is that women fulfilled and continue to fill a major role in the local church. In helping us to understand how important the role of African American women is in the local church, Marica Riggs gives this statement, “...Women’s voice(s) are consistent with a black prophetic tradition rooted in a relationship between religion and radicalism found in the “prophetic wing of the black church.””⁵⁶ Therefore, we can see that African American women played a vital role in forming black culture and the black church.

Dr. Wayne Croft, in his book *A History of the Black Baptist: I Don’t Feel No Ways Tired*, spoke of the role of women in the National Baptist Convention. He stated, “They [women] courageously spoke out on the needs of the church, suffrage, women’s rights, lynching, segregation, education, employment, denominational hegemony, racism, and a host of other social concerns.”⁵⁷ Even to this present day, women fulfill a prominent role in the local church. As Leonard continues to inform us, “In some black Baptist congregations, women occupy offices as deaconesses, nurses, “mothers of the church” and participants in various women’s groups. Some also recognize women’s roles as

⁵⁶ Marcia Y. Riggs, ed., *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1997), xii.

⁵⁷ Wayne E. Croft, *A History of the Black Baptist Church: I Don’t Feel No Ways Tired* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2020), 86.

“evangelist-preachers” who can proclaim the gospel in the church.”⁵⁸ However, as we are examining the historical role of African American women in the local church, we understand that it has always been present. It has always been a constant. Their role in the community has always been needed and necessary for progress.

Now, this role was filled with opposition. Some were not allowed to be ordained. They were not given the ability to have leadership opportunities. Even when they were allowed to preach, they were not given the title of “reverend” or “minister” but simply “evangelist.” Even in our current culture, which in part I am admittedly ashamed of, some mainstream denominations still do not recognize women in ministry. However, history has proven to us that women were vital to the progress of the ministry. As Katie G. Cannon puts it, “...African American women used their church [service] to address education, childcare, and nutrition among the freed people.”⁵⁹

To deal with this problem many have taken to writing and using their platforms to show that this inequality is not of God. As Prathia Hall Wynn stated, “...God held them no less accountable than men for the salvation of souls. My suspicion is that many of these women leaders felt called to ministry as I do today.”⁶⁰ As stated before, unfortunately, many African American women in my denomination have been met with their share of sexism and marginalization that has kept them in the shadows, but this did not keep them out of the fight.

⁵⁸ Leonard, 222.

⁵⁹ Katie G. Cannon, “In Celebration of African American Women's Religious Activism,” *The Journal of African American History* 96, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 352.

⁶⁰ Prathia Hall-Wynn and Evelyn Higginbotham, “Called but Not Chosen,” *The Women's Review of Books* 11, no. 12 (September 1994): 31–32, 32.

In her book *Freedom Faith: the Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall*, Courtney Pace delves into how Hall stayed with the Baptist denomination even though she was widely not accepted. Hall states, “The Baptist church is going to have to deal with me. Some of us must remain in the recalcitrant church. Everything we know about God is that the living God is not a bigot.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, even though women like Prathia Hall and others were not accepted, and still not to this day, African American women across denominational lines continued to uplift the African American community.

This must show a level of resolve in God and community like no other. To not be accepted but still stand for injustice in your community shows us the level of faith that African American women possessed. They refused to accept no, knowing that there “yes” was vital to the strength of their community. Their refusal to allow their traumatic experiences of unacceptance did not allow their faith to waiver for the overall well-being of the entire community. A couple of these communities were the New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family, African American Women in the American Missionary Society, and Victoria Earle Mathews & the Women’s Loyal Union.

The New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family

One of the missionary groups that we would like to highlight during this era are the New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family. This organization was a group of African American Catholic women in New Orleans during the 1800’s. Edward T. Brett gives us an insight into how the sisters operated and what they believed. He stated in his article, “Race Issues and Conflict in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Religious Life:

⁶¹ Courtney Pace, *Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2019), 104.

The New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family, “In the Holy Sisters archives, a notebook containing a document dated November 21, 1836, lists the “Rules and Regulations for the Congregations of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It commits the sisters to a common purpose: “to care for the sick, help the poor, and instruct the ignorant.”⁶²

This group of missionaries was instrumental in helping the African American community there in New Orleans and even abroad. The Catholic presence has been in North America since at least the early 1500s. Some historians agree that “the first known Catholic of African descent in North America was not a woman. His name was Esteban, and he was enslaved.”⁶³ Nonetheless, as the Catholic church grew in North America, missionaries were needed. However, African American women were not readily accepted in Catholic missionary societies. Historians suggest, “White religious communities did not accept African American women until the twentieth century. The idea that African American women could live moral and chaste lives committed to God as did white religious women, was unacceptable by many Catholics.”⁶⁴ Yet even with this level of adversity, the Sisters of the Holy Family strived forward with their cause.

These sisters of African and Creole descent had an “upper hand” because of their light skin tone. One of its leading missionaries was a woman named Henriette Delille.

⁶² Edward T. Brett, “Race Issues and Conflict in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Religious Life: The New Orleans Sisters of the Holy Family,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 113-27.

⁶³ Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Bradford Ruether, eds., *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1:160.

⁶⁴ Keller, 160.

Delille states in a poem, “The faith that guides me: is it black or white? Is my love beige? What color is my soul? And does it matter in His opinion?”⁶⁵

Even though Delille and other sisters in the order persevered through the times, they were still committed to serving those around them. In the article, *No Cross, No Crown*, we are informed that Delille was “a free woman of color who was born in 1813 and broke family tradition and chose to dedicate her life to God.”⁶⁶ Over the years, the ministry continued to grow and became accepted by the catholic parishes of the New Orleans region. By 1847, they were able to incorporate themselves with the Society of the Holy Family in Louisiana.

African American Women in the American Missionary Society

As we were able to see in our previous section, African and African American women had and still have a significant presence in the Lord’s church. However, we understand that there was a high level of disenfranchisement for a moment. As African American men were unable to do things such as vote, hold office, or ascertain specific jobs for employment, that became difficult and even non-existent for African American women as well. Yes, they had a significant presence in their home and community. Yet, African American women did not have the political tools to formulate their vision of healing others on a global scale. Nonetheless, God intervened and opened a wide door in forming the American Missionary Society.

⁶⁵ Marilyn Nelson, “Henriette Delille,” *Obsidian* 41, no. 1 (Fall 2015): 254-55.

⁶⁶ Cyprian Davis et al., “No Cross, No Crown: The Journal of Sister Mary Bernard Deggs,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 18.

The American Missionary Society, or AMA, was formed primarily by a group of white abolitionists between the time of the American Revolution and the American Civil War. One author stated: “The AMA was founded in 1846 as an abolitionist organization by churchmen – black and white, mainly Congregational and Presbyterian – as a protest against the process of denominational and interdenominational mission agencies of accepting money from slaveholders.”⁶⁷ This agency would help freedmen in the country in their ability to read, write, and learn other educational skills.

To accomplish this, the AMA enlisted the help of African American women to become teachers. As these women became teachers, they were able to use their skills to advance their people. As black women worked alongside the AMA, they were even able to help begin some historically black colleges, such as Spelman and Hampton Institute, which would later become Hampton University. These sisters understood the value of education and worked together with their white counterparts to help educate and train children, men, and women of all ages to better our forward progress as African American people.

Victoria Earle Mathews & the Women’s Loyal Union

The Women’s Loyal Union was begun by notable women abolitionists in New York City around the end of the 1800s to the turn of the new century. As African American women were active in church missions, they were also active in social missions as well. As persons like Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells were considered to have that “prophetic voice,”; African American women believed that it was not only their God-

⁶⁷ Clara Merritt Deboer, *His Truth Is Marching On: African Americans Who Taught the Freedmen for the American Missionary Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 4.

given responsibility to help the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and educate the illiterate but also to speak truth to power. This group, the Women's Loyal Union, was founded by Victoria Earle Matthews. Matthews was a voice of power during this time. Steve Kramer, in his writing on her life, stated: "Victoria Earle Matthews was the logical choice to speak to the Hampton Negro Conference about the problems facing southern black women and girls when they migrated to northern urban areas in the late 1890s."⁶⁸ By then, she had already begun the settlement houses to help some in the urban New York area.

Matthews "pulled no punches" and advocated for the well-being of African Americans. This was in part because of Matthew's background. Matthews, who knew what it meant to be both enslaved and emancipated, was able to give firsthand knowledge of both worlds. This also gave her a passion for people. One writer informs us that "Matthews symbolically positioned herself at the crossroads of history, but she also used her birth into slavery as a literal connection to enslaved women, enabling her role as a translator between the black women of the past and those of the future."⁶⁹

One of the major issues that African Americans were facing at that time was lynching. Lynching was the ability of a white man, more frequently in the Jim Crow South, to hang or "lynch" a black man, teenager, or even boy. James Cone, in his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, informs us, "In its heyday, the lynching of black Americans was no secret. It was a public spectacle, often announced in newspapers and

⁶⁸ Steve Kramer, "Uplifting Our Downtrodden Sisterhood: Victoria Earle Matthews and New York City's White Rose Mission, 1897-1907," *The Journal of African American History* 91, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 243.

⁶⁹ Kerstin Rudolph, "Victoria Earle Matthews: Making Literature During the Woman's Era," *Legacy* 33, no. 1 (2016): 107.

over radios, attracting crowds of up to twenty-thousand people.”⁷⁰ Nonetheless, before the words written by Cone and others, African American women were doing their part to bring awareness and hopefully an end to the matter. History tells us, “In 1892, Victoria Earle Matthews organized the Women’s Loyal Union to support Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching crusade and to attack other forms of racial discrimination locally and nationally. Due to Matthews’s help and the WLU’s persistent support, Ida B. Wells was able to garner enough money to continue her speaking and publications. Wells was able to publish the writing entitled *Southern Horrors*.

A Better Understanding of Community

Now that we have seen that the role of African American women in the community and the local church has been foundational to its forward progress, we cannot say it is, was, or has been a success because we understand that all glory must be given to God our creator. Nevertheless, they have had a lasting and influential presence in the ministry and community. As mentioned before, the role of African American women in the church should not be ignored. It should be valued and appreciated for what it is and has been. It has been a driving force for the gospel message and the Lord’s church. Sisters have helped to stabilize the community and bring peace, educational prowess, and fundamental skills for our well-being.

These women valued their community. They understand more than most the plight of the African American male, family unit, and culture. Moreover, they did what was necessary to help those in their community. They watched their children taken away

⁷⁰ Cone, xiv.

to be sold as enslaved people. They had to deal with being raped and molested by white men or even men of their families. They had to deal with seeing their fathers or husbands hung on trees like ornaments for just wanting the opportunity to vote. They had to deal with being left and looked over in the local church and denominationally. Nevertheless, they saw the need for “community”. They saw the need for one another in the body of Christ.

As the focus of the project is to seek the development of community, the groups' actions fall in line with the project's scope and goal. Community is essential for development, and we have seen through these historical vignettes the power of community. There is power when we come together and more power when we work together. These women worked together, and now, we who are in the future are reaping its benefits.

Even though the Catholic church did not want to affirm women until the 20th century, history is still valid. The work of the sisters in New Orleans cannot be overlooked. These sisters were able to raise money, educate the community, and they did it together. As we look closer, we see there was uneasiness at times, but they kept their focus and accomplished their goal. Clearly, there were some trials as white missionaries understood they did not everything they needed to minister to African American people. This is why the role of the African American sisters in the AMA was needed and necessary. We can at least credit the white missionaries for seeing they needed help. Then, what more can we say about African American missionaries and missionaries' societies? They were more than just for the church in the idea of getting people saved. They were focused on community.

In formation of the Women's Loyal Union, Victoria Earle Matthews understood the value of the African American life as well as their soul. Her work to use her ability to partner with others to bring more awareness to the plight of African Americans is essential to what building community is all about. These groups give us an adequate foundation for our project; as mentioned before, church leaders need community. It is more than just preserving the mind; it is all the whole man/woman of God.

This ties into our biblical premise as well. I can personally see Ruth and Naomi as a part of one, if not all, of these groups. Their belief in coming together by faith in and community changed the trajectory of their lives. Naomi could have allowed things to be as they were. Ruth had the option, just like Orpah, to return to Moab. However, both use their faith and the power of community to transform their lives. Naomi helps Ruth and Ruth helps Naomi, this community. As Ruth was concerned about Naomi, so were these other groups concerned about the people of their time and the future.

The local church in this postmodern age must remember that we are better together. What happened to women like Prathia Hall should never happen again. We must realize that God works through both men and women. He also works through young and old. He works through the married and those who have been divorced. He works through those who have been sober all their lives and ones who are in twelve-step programs. These African American women value community, and so should we. We should not have some egalitarian approach to church. We should be welcoming and open to all. These women were able to see we are better together than separate, and that God can work through us collectively.

A Plea for Inventive Evangelism

One of the more memorable things about this research area is how inventive each group was in the quest to help the African American community. Each group used inventive techniques, which must be the case for the local church. These groups understood that with their deficiencies as African American women in a racist, misogynistic, and patriarchal society, they needed to have an inventive approach to make new strides. The local church must remember that they are up against some significant challenges.

The local church has to deal with the challenge of a lack of respect for the church, which has led to many walking away and going to other faiths. The local church also had to deal with the idea that more have lost their feelings for the gospel message and don't even read the bible. Dr. Cheryl Bridges-Johns states, "Christians of all stripes spend more time attending to social media, television, video games, and pleasure reading than they spend reading, listening to and studying the Bible."⁷¹

With this being the case, the local church must invest in inventive evangelism methods to reclaim souls back to the local congregation. Just giving a sermon or passing out a tract is not enough. We must be like these African American women of old and find inventive ways to help our community. We must remember that the people in the community are believers. As George Barna states, "By definition, the unchurched do not attend services, but that does not mean they have abandoned all faith activities."⁷² Even

⁷¹ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Re-Enchanting the Text: Discovering the Bible as Sacred, Dangerous, and Mysterious* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 2.

⁷² George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them: Based on Surveys by Barna Group* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 57.

though this is mentioned for the unchurched, this is the same for those who have some “church history” but have not attended in some time.

Therefore, how do we reach them? We must invest in inventive ways and methods to reach these people and help them assimilate into the local church. To do this type of evangelism, we must remember that we have been called to be evangelists. One writer stated, “Even though God is the one who saves, people are needed to persuade nonbelievers of their need for salvation.”⁷³ These African American women did not leave it up to chance to join the movement. They stepped up to the plate and did what was needed. The church must first see that we are to do the same.

Secondly, we must see what would work for our church and community. Authenticity is always the key to being a great evangelist. I believe these women did what worked for them, nothing more and nothing less. They were in tune with who they were, their gifts, weaknesses, positives, negatives, and the whole array of other data. Churches need not simply throw caution at the wind and carry out a blank program for reclaiming lost souls. In 2023, several modes of data can help churches create comprehensive programs that play to their strengths to reach as many persons for Christ as possible. In the book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christians and Why it Matters*, the authors state, “Outsiders think Christianity is out of tune with real world issues, challenges, and lifestyles they face.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Gary McIntosh, *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 158.

⁷⁴ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity-- and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 96.

However, to combat this, John Fuder states the following, “In order for God’s people to be an active presence in their neighboring communities and be engaged with those needs around them, they have to be increasingly aware of that audience, their hopes, their dreams, and their needs.”⁷⁵ This allows for the local church to create authentic experiences in which they can reach lost souls. These authentic experiences are needed, but they are necessary. In doing so, we will follow the lead of these African American women and change our society for the better.

⁷⁵ John Fuder, *Neighborhood Mapping: How to Make Your Church Invaluable to the Community* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 15.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In 1877, Hattie E. Buell wrote a hymn for the church. It is less popular than John Newton's *Amazing Grace* or Isaac Watts' *At the Cross*. Nevertheless, the words and tune still ring true. Buell writes, "My Father is rich in houses and land. He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands! Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold, His coffers are full. He has riches untold... With Jesus my Savior, I'm a child of the King."⁷⁶ Now, if I am saved and a child of the king, this must mean I am a part of a kingdom. A kingdom exists as a community of those who serve and live at the behest of its king.

In the modern world, we know of kingdoms such as Great Britain and the People's Republic of China. Even where we live now, known as the United States of America, is a kingdom. Even though we do not have a "king" or monarchical form of government, we who live here enjoy the community that has been established. We enjoy our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We enjoy the fruit of our labor and even the labor of others. We enjoy the security of our borders. Moreover, we enjoy even the picturesque views of the countryside of West Virginia, the foothills of Ohio, the desert plains of Arizona, and the mountains of California.

⁷⁶ NY Author: Hattie E. Buell "A Child of the King," *Hymnary.org*, accessed October 17, 2022, https://hymnary.org/text/my_father_is_rich_in_houses_and_lands.

If you noticed, in this introductory vignette, I have used the words “community” and “we” to give credence to what has been called a kingdom. Therefore, I began to wonder what is our community. What do we have? What do we call this kingdom? The Old Testament gives words as “like” and “assembly.” Genesis 28:3 states, “May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you so that you become an assembly of peoples.” Think about it! As an assembly, we had the Tower of Babel. As an assembly, we had two large groups cross major bodies of water.

Even as an assembly, we had a request for a king, which Henry Flanders in his book, *The People of the Covenant* suggests, “Survival of Israel’s religion demanded it.”⁷⁷ As we investigate the gospels, we see Jesus Christ use the “kingdom.” In Matthew 4:17, the bible says, “From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!” Moreover, in John 18:36, Jesus uses it again as he mentions to Pontius Pilate before his passion; “My kingdom is not of this world,” said Jesus. “If My kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I wouldn’t be handed over to the Jews. As it is, my kingdom does not have its origin here.”

Yet I believe that Jesus utilizes a greater word for us other than assembly and kingdom in the bible. Jesus uses a word called “church”. According to the Holman Christian Standard Bible, it is only used twice in the gospels. This is the same for the King James and English Standard versions. But in the context of using it, Jesus shows us that his kingdom community is called the “church.” Author James Evans, in his book entitled *We Have Been Believers*, suggests the following about the church; “These are

⁷⁷ Henry Jackson Flanders, Robert W. Crapps, and David Anthony Smith, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 263.

“the company of the elect, “the family of God” and the “nation of God.”⁷⁸ Jesus responds to Peter’s confession of faith; “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The church as we know it today is so vital to our existence as Christians. Its community with Christ and with others helps us develop our faith and focus on reality. As we have seen thus far the need, importance, and use of community through our biblical text and historical perspective, we can also see it theologically.

What is Systematic Theology

Before we understand the theological importance of the church, we need to understand the process toward the theological significance of the church. Of course, we have the biblical narrative of Matthew 16, but how does that fit in the overall image of God, Christ, His Spirit, and His Kingdom? To answer this one, we must dive into what is known as systematic theology. Looking into the narrative of systematic theology helps us to understand God, Christ, the Spirit, salvation, and even the church at a higher level. There are several different definitions or ideas about systematic theology.

Robert Doran suggests that “Systematics attempts to understand what has been affirmed.”⁷⁹ Based on Doran’s suggestion, one could believe that what is affirmed is the universal use of the Apostles or Nicene Creed. Therefore, systematic theology helps us understand who God is, Jesus, in his passion, resurrection, and the Holy Spirit. Along

⁷⁸ James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 128.

⁷⁹ Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 8.

with the universal church, entrance into said church and regeneration of the soul are affirmed throughout the Christian faith. Thus, Doran further states, “The aim of systematics is to present an assimilable whole and unified understanding of Christian doctrine.”⁸⁰ John Webster also gives his opinion by stating, “Systematic theology attempts a conceptional articulation of Christian claims about God and everything else in relation to God.”⁸¹ Now, as Thiselton suggests “Theology is a living growing subject.”⁸² putting it in a succinct and organized way helps us as believers understand what it is that we believe.

The start of this goes back to Louis Berkoff’s outlines as the tasks of the apologists. As we can look back to the evolution of time and the maturation of the Christian community, we see that more people were able to read. Being able to read allowed for more people who could reason. With more persons who could read and reason, we now have persons who could garner their own opinion on various subjects, including theology and the church's fundamental truths. Berkoff suggests, “Pressure from without and from within called a clear statement and defense for the truth.”⁸³ As Berkoff continued to explain, the role of the apologist was not that simple. They had to defend what we believed while constructing it in a way everyone could understand.

⁸⁰ Doran, 9.

⁸¹ John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (*Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology*), 1st ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

⁸² Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015, 2.

⁸³ Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1937, 56.

As we move past the period of the apologists, we then get help from what Berkoff calls the anti-gnostic fathers. Others call them the early church fathers. Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and others help to build our thinking and dogma. In seeing this, we must understand that our theology, as we mentioned from Thistelton, is living. It does not mean that it is fluid or fluctuates, but as we better understand God, we have better theology. As we get a deeper insight, this does not change our fundamental truths, but we are able to strengthen as the apologists and early church fathers were able to do.

The parameters of systematic theology are different depending on the writer or author. For example, Thomas Oden place(s) systematic theology in three categories. First the Living God. This helps us to understand who God is, his name, his nature, his character, and his works. Second, he moves to “The Word of Life”. For Oden, this encompasses the work of Jesus Christ. Finally, Oden examines Life in the Spirit. Here, he unpacks the role of the Holy Spirit, what it means to be saved, regeneration, and the church's work.

Another theologian, Charles Finney, took a different approach. Finney believed that a proper approach to systematic theology must also include another knowledge basis outside of the divine or spiritual realm. In a work on Finney’s theological process, one author suggested that “Finney believed that we need to study the laws of the mind, logic, psychology, and other sciences in our efforts to bring the powers of reasons to bear upon the unconverted mind.”⁸⁴ For example, the authors go on to say that “...Finney used

⁸⁴ Charles G. Finney et al., *Finney's Systematic Theology: Lectures on Classes of Truths, Moral Government, the Atonement, Moral and Physical Depravity, Natural, Moral, and Gracious Ability, Repentance, Faith, Justification, Sanctification, Election, Divine Sovereignty & Perseverance of the Saints* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994, xvii.

illustrations of firemen rescuing people from burning homes to motivate people to do evangelism and rescue people from the fires of hell.”⁸⁵

Ecclesiology

One of the parts of our systematic theology as Christians is the church's role, which is known as ecclesiology. Depending on the denominational structure, the term for church could be parish, temple, or center. Guy Mansini, in his work in helping us to understand ecclesiology, states, “The idea of a “church” is the society of men and women who share a common life with God and with one another.”⁸⁶ Therefore, the church is the epicenter of what we do as believers. I agree with one theologian who states, “Church history, like any other history, is written from the perspective of those who hold power.”⁸⁷ It is introduced to us in several ways throughout the bible but primarily seen in Matthew 16:13-20. Here, we find Jesus in one of his final discourses with his disciples and asks the infamous question of who they say he is. The Bible says, “Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” Based on this confession of faith given by Peter, Jesus then established what is called the “church.”

The scripture says in verses seventeen and eighteen, And Jesus responded, “Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.” The word

⁸⁵ Finney, xvii.

⁸⁶ Guy Mansini, *Ecclesiology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 9.

⁸⁷ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Historical, Global, and Interreligious Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 89.

“church” given to us here is the word “ekklesia.” Thomas Oden suggests that the word “ekklesia” is first given to us through the Septuagint and is a derivative of the Hebrew word “qahal.”

Both words give the symbolic interpretation of a group or assembly. However, for Oden, “ekklesia” takes it a step further. He states, “There is a noteworthy difference that quickly emerged between qahal and ekklesia; the qahal was, strictly speaking, a calling forth of men, only the circumcised, while the ekklesia included women, children, and men; all those baptized.”⁸⁸ Seeing this and considering what Jesus says in Matthew 16, shows us his earnest desire to develop a community, not just an assembly. In his commentary on Matthew 16, Ulrich Luz states, “It also seems clear that “my church” means the whole church and not simply an individual congregation.”⁸⁹

Now, in understanding this and putting it in some palatable form, we find that scholars and theologians developed a portion of our systematic theology known as ecclesiology. As mentioned, it is rooted in our Apostles Creed, for the creed states, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints.” In this, we, the church, are again exemplified as a community. In his book, *The Apostles Creed: A Faith to Live* by, C.E.B. Cranfield states, “The church is the congregation assembled by the Holy Spirit's work of creation and sustaining in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992, 265.

⁸⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Hermeneia —A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Matthew 8-20* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001, 362.

⁹⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Apostles' Creed: A Faith to Live* By New York, NY: Continuum, 2004, 60.

We have Baptist and Presbyterian assemblies. We also have assemblies: Church of God, Church of Christ, Church of Christ Holiness USA, and Church of God in Christ. This is even seen in the scripture. John 10:16 outlines this for us. Here in this passage, we see that Jesus is talking about how He is the Good Shepherd, but as He was then and is still now that Good Shepherd, He acknowledges that there are different sheepfolds within his farmland or shepherd-reach. The Bible says, “But I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd.” One theologian stated, “Both groups will form a new unity, a unity which is centered in Jesus himself.”

This brings us to another understanding of the term ecclesiology; it is not just about the church as the epicenter of what we do. Ecclesiology is also rooted in the idea that we are a community. This community shares several things. The preeminent thought is that we share in the things of Christ. As Acts 2:42 states, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.” The early church devoted themselves to an inclusive fellowship of learning about God and growing in their faith. Cranfield states, “The members of Christ’s church share the holy things, that is all God has done, is doing and will do for us in Jesus Christ, all the benefits and obligations that come from God’s actions.”⁹¹

Not only do we share in the holy things of God, but we also form a sense of community with one another. The Apostle’s Creed helps us to identify that as it states again, I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints. As a Baptist minister in our church's Articles of Faith, we have the same elements, which

⁹¹ Cranfield, 64.

states, “We believe the Scriptures teach that a visible church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel.”

⁹² Now, as Oden states, “If the church did not exist, then there would be no community in which to make [our] confession.”⁹³

Even though we make our confession, ecclesiology shows us that we also share in the mission of the church to win souls for Christ as outlined in Matthew 20:18-20. We share together the miracles provided by God, as we saw in Peter's miraculous escape from prison in Acts 12. However, we also share in the misery that befalls us together, as we see in the death of Tabitha in Acts 9. Therefore, our communion is a community.

Ecclesiology of Paul Tillich

One of the leading theologians that has informed my view of ecclesiology is Paul Tillich. Tillich, a renowned theologian at the beginning of the 20th century, is known for views on systematic theology. Growing up during both world wars and experiencing the different vicissitudes of life help to shape Tillich's thinking and theology. As a theologian, Tillich was one of the brightest thinkers known to Christianity and culture during his time. In John Newport's biography on Tillich, he states the following from Wilhem Pauck, “...there are two kinds of thinkers: autobiographical and impersonal or objective. Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Tillich are seen as autobiographical thinkers while Thomas Aquinas is seen as one [of the] more impersonal thinkers.”⁹⁴ To be

⁹²“What We Believe,” National Baptist Convention, USA Inc., Last modified March 9, 2018, <https://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-nbc/what-we-believe>.

⁹³ Oden, 261.

⁹⁴ John P. Newport and Bob E. Patterson, *Paul Tillich* Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984, 21.

included with a major writer of the New Testament and the Bible alone, one of the early church fathers and one who is responsible for the Protestant Reformation, gives us a great understanding of the type of theologian and thinker Tillich was for his time. Moreover, it also gives credence to the use of his work for life, church, and culture today.

Again, in learning about Tillich, I believe that there were life events that help shaped his overall theology and especially his view of the church. Tillich saw the church as a community. His views of ecclesiology were not just to classify the church as a center of biblical thought but that it should also impact the surrounding culture. As stated before, Tillich lived during both world wars. Nonetheless, he lived in Germany. With Germany being one of the main progenitors of World War I and the main progenitor in World War II, he had first-hand knowledge of what crisis can do to a community.

During the First World War, Tillich was a chaplain in the armed services. Either giving words of hope and comfort or offering a prayer for those who were killed during the conflict this time took a toll on Tillich. During his younger years, he would take solace in a local fraternity. Newport suggested, “In this fraternity he [Tillich] learned the importance of membership in a voluntary Christian with a purpose.”⁹⁵

Tillich would further fulfill his purpose by giving the world different writings on Systematic Theology. In his theology, Tillich saw the church as a powerful agency. In the book *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, the writer suggests the following of Tillich’s view of the church; “The church is responsible for the outside world.”⁹⁶ This thinking came to a head for Tillich, especially during the second world war conflict.

⁹⁵ Newport, 24.

⁹⁶ Charles W. Kegley, *The Theology of Paul Tillich* New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964, 260.

With the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich, Nazism swept through Germany. This was a time when Jewish families were being attacked, slaughtered, and moved to concentration camps. All the while, Christian families were being extorted, books were being burned, and knowledge of anything outside of Nazism was being quashed. In a speech to those in Germany, Tillich stated, “Protestantism must stand against the heathenism of swastika and for the cross.”⁹⁷ Due to his view, Tillich found himself living the rest of his life in America and not his homeland of Europe.

Nonetheless, this shows Tillich’s view of ecclesiology. The church, he called out, is not an epicenter of sermons and discourse but a community of faith. In his book *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich states, “The life of faith is life in the community of faith, not only in its communal activities but all in the life of members.”⁹⁸ Now, Tillich did not believe the church got it right all the time. One writer suggested the following on Tillich’s thought of the church, “The present church, therefore, is diffused with ambiguity as well as grace and it must await its own redemption before it can fulfill fully its own historical task.”⁹⁹

Tillich understood the church had its imperfections. However, he believed in the essence of ecclesiology and its purpose of developing a community of faith to enrich the larger culture. Yet, not only does the church enrich the culture by standing for what is right, Tillich saw that our ecclesiology helps us remain in the faith. Tillich states, “Faith cannot remain alive without expressions of faith and the personal participation in

⁹⁷ Newport, 34

⁹⁸ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* London: Allen & Unwin, 1957, 118.

⁹⁹ James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, and Roger Lincoln Shinn, *The Thought of Paul Tillich* San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985, 343.

them.”¹⁰⁰ Tillich showed that a proper view of ecclesiology helps your own faith. As one writer states, “Spiritual community is the one absolute in the ecclesiology of Paul Tillich.”¹⁰¹

For Tillich, the community is an inclusive kingdom of God. All are welcome. All are needed. All can find what they need in the community. This was not just Tillich's thinking; it was his life. He believed the church should “express and manifest the theonomous center of the culture.” He found solace in the church community. He found hope in the church community. He even found protection in his livelihood through the church community.

Tillich's View of Ecclesiology and in Postmodern Culture

There is little to no dissent from Tillich's views on ecclesiology. Many theologians are in alignment with him that the church is a called-out community. Moreover, in my opinion, it would be very difficult for one to see an opposite viewpoint. To do so would not only negate Tillich and other theologians but also negate scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, we see God's intent for a holy nation. In his call to Abraham in Genesis 12, God sets the tone; I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” Then John in Revelation states, “After this, I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were robed in white with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud

¹⁰⁰ Tillich, 121.

¹⁰¹ Thomas F. O'Meara and Donald M. Weisser, *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought* Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1964, 239.

voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Therefore, it is God’s intent for a community that serves and worships him.

Nevertheless, we can see the impact of Tillich’s and other theologians’ work on and in today’s society. In our research, we found two case studies of how a proper view of ecclesiology has helped the local church carry out its mission and those in the surrounding community. The first case study was done in Canada, where church cultures dealt with persons with dementia. The Cleveland Clinic states the following about the disease and disorder of dementia, “Dementia is a general term that represents a group of diseases and illnesses that affect your thinking, memory, reasoning, personality, mood, and behavior. The decline in mental function interferes with your daily life and activities.”¹⁰²

In the case study sampled, social scientists decided to use the local church as a field for their experiment. In the article, “Supporting Healthy Dementia Culture: An Exploratory Study of the Church” authors Robyn Plunkett and Peter Chen stated, “The church was selected as the first community structure to explore because it is often a familiar place to seniors.”¹⁰³ They also believe that “Religious centers are one of the largest access points for social connections for older adults.”¹⁰⁴ Now, through their research, they were able to see that not only did older adults in church communities suffer from dementia, but they also have a myriad of ailments that congregants deal with.

¹⁰² “Dementia: Symptoms, Types, Causes, Treatment & Risk Factors,” Cleveland Clinic, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9170-dementia>.

¹⁰³ Robyn Plunkett and Peter Chen, “Supporting Healthy Dementia Culture: An Exploratory Study of the Church,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 6 (December 2016): pp. 1917-1928, 1918.

¹⁰⁴ Plunket, 1919.

Furthermore, they were also able to see that it is not just those who are sick but there is also a community of those who are caregivers. These persons are in the congregation as well. Moreover, even though they had no medical issues that warranted care, they were still in need of respite.

However, in reading the article, I was able to see ecclesiology at work. First, the article informed us of how the church's communal actions help those in trouble with dementia. Again, as Tillich showed us, the church is not just a symbol but a living, breathing community, and this was evident in this case study. The authors showed how singing hymns played a vital role to those who were ill. The authors stated, "Singing hymns also provided individuals (dementia patients) with the opportunity to contribute to the community, which might create feelings of accomplishment and belonging."¹⁰⁵

A second case study was found in Indonesia. Even though this case study takes place thousands of miles away from here in the United States, it has a home-like relevance. Since 2020, the entire world has been engulfed in the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. One of the initial ramifications of the pandemic was that church buildings were closed to the public. This was different than a church disbanding, members on vacation, or the pastor taking a season of "Sabbath". There were literally churches whose doors were closed. The closing of the physical building moved the church to worship and serve online.

Now we understand that having church online or a digital presence in the local church was not foreign to us in 2020. Many church leaders were already streaming the services on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or Periscope. However, many

¹⁰⁵ Plunket, 1918.

churches were not “online” and even felt that it was an “unnecessary evil”. In the book, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, the author Heidi Campbell states the following, “It is true that offline religious practitioners and organizations often fear that Internet-based community is somehow inauthentic, impoverished, deceptive or holds a seductive potential power to lead people out of the pew and way from face-to-face community.”¹⁰⁶ I, too, felt this way to an extent, but due to the pandemic, the church was left with no choice.

In the article, *Pandemic Ecclesiology: Church Re-actualization During the Pandemic*, the authors were able to show that the church was still able to function based on its fundamental truths of ecclesiology. First and foremost, they reminded us of the basic tenets of Christian theology with a proper understanding of God. The author stated, “Within the framework of Christian theology, it is understood that God is the spirit not limited by place, time or other means.”¹⁰⁷ With this being true, they were able to show us that virtual ministry is not opposite to ecclesiology. As a matter of fact, it actually helps to continue the work that God desires for us to carry out. The authors state, “...virtual ministry is a necessity in carrying out the main tasks of the church, including fellowship (koinonia), marturia (witnessing), teaching (didaskalia), ministry (diaconia), and pastoralism (pastoralia).”¹⁰⁸ In my opinion and in light of the work of Tillich, failure to

¹⁰⁶ Heidi Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* New York, NY: Routledge - Taylor & Francis Group, 2013, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Gernaída K.R. Pakpahan et al., “Pandemic Ecclesiology: Church Re-Actualisation during the Pandemic,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022), 4.

¹⁰⁸ Pakpahan, 3.

attempt to have virtual worship puts the church at odds with its own doctrine and scripture.

Many who do not have a virtual option do so by choice still believing what Campbell stated that it takes away from face-to-face community. However, community is more than just face-to-face interaction. That is what we are accustomed to for the last one hundred years. But the church was always a community and the ekklesia before such a time. As the article stated, “The church found ways to convey the gospel message early through a wide variety of tools.”¹⁰⁹ Ezra did use in-person gatherings, while Paul used letters, Luther used the printing press, Wesley used the outdoors, Tillich speeches and books, Billy Sunday used tents, and Dr. Martin King used the Lincoln Memorial and the Edmond Pettus Bridge.

Both case studies showed us that Tillich’s work is still vital and relevant to today’s culture. By giving us not only systematic theology but a succinct view of how the church should function through the role of ecclesiology, the church is still relevant today even amid a global pandemic. This does come with a set of challenges which can be outlined later. Nevertheless, Tillich’s argument and the pulse of Christ’s commands in scripture are still pertinent to today’s culture in showing the value and necessity of the local church and the communal culture it develops.

Conclusion

Tillich’s view on ecclesiology and the church aligns with our biblical exegesis of Ruth. As mentioned in the section before, Tillich saw the church as a community. The

¹⁰⁹ Pakpahan, 3.

church was more than just a religious sect or symbol. Tillich urged those in the church to stand for what was right in the second world war against Nazism. For Tillich this was important for the local body to do to help the community at large. Therefore, Tillich showed us that the church works best when we look outside of ourselves and develop a community of faith. In her book entitled *Left Behind in a Megachurch World*, Ruth Tucker suggests that the “ideal” of community must not die. It is as fundamental to Christianity as it to marriage.”¹¹⁰ There is no church without community.

Now, as we look at the “marriage” of this principle with our biblical text, we see the following presupposition. If community helps the church in a macrocosm, then that same movement of community should help in a microcosm. Tillich’s view on the church is at a “macro” level while Ruth’s insertion in Naomi is at the “micro.” Even though this is the case, the same principle is true for both situations: community matters. Some theologians do take it to an extreme. Tucker states, “Rodney Clapp argues that church (as community) should be regarded as our first family in relation to our biological or nuclear which he maintains is second.”¹¹¹ I do not concur, and I do not believe Tillich would either that the church should replace your individual family unit. Neither would Ruth or Naomi. However, the principles of what the church is and should be are evident in their relationship.

E. John Hamlin states in his book, *Surely There is a Future*, “Today, may be compared with women and men who cross cultural, racial, and regional boundaries to

¹¹⁰ Ruth Tucker, *Left behind in a Megachurch World: How God Works through Ordinary Churches* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006, 127.

¹¹¹ Tucker, 127.

bind themselves with one another in faith based on covenantal relationships that look to the future with faith and hope.”¹¹² The key thread for Ruth’s move and Tillich’s desire for the church is one simple word, “risk.” Both saw that taking risks and entering the community is better than not doing anything. Tillich desired the church to take the risk and do more than just give theological treatises. In comparison, Ruth takes the risk and enters a community she has little to no knowledge of. One author stated, “Ruth helps to provide the family that Naomi never had, and within the web of new relations, Ruth and Naomi find a family and a home together.”¹¹³

Even as we look at a historical account of African American women given prior; they too took a risk. Lives could have been shattered, harmed, or taken away. Standing for those who could not stand for themselves was not easy. Yet they took the risk, and now our world is the better. I believe that pastors, laity, and church workers need to take this much needed risk and be intentional about developing community. Now, it is risky business because one will make himself/herself vulnerable, exposed, and wide-open to criticism.

However, failure to do so can lead to traumatic experiences for the individual, their family, and their church community. We can assume that if persons would have heeded Tillich’s word and taken the same risk he did to stand against Nazism, it is possible that several, if not thousands or millions of lives could have been spared. Tillich did pay for his risks by not being able to live in his homeland but at least he was able to

¹¹² E. John Hamlin, *Surely There Is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth* Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996, 20.

¹¹³O’Meara, 258.

live. Failure to take the necessary risks and develop a system of community in the life, pastor, and church worker could lead to the opposite.

Therefore, the theological foundation of ecclesiology is another golden thread in this project. Understanding the systematic view of Paul Tillich that the church is a community helps us to gain a better understanding of Ruth and Naomi's relationship. It is good to see that the views given by Tillich not only help this project but have been beneficial to other projects and case studies. Now our hope is that others will continue to embrace it. As we see our world is more fragmented than before, community is needed. However, it cannot just be a group of people gathering. No, what is needed is a community that is built on the bedrock of our faith that Jesus Christ is Lord.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Sunday, February 5, 2012, will be a day that will always be etched in my memory. To better understand that day I feel the need to take you back to the previous week. I had a preaching engagement in Detroit, Michigan, and my mother and aunt traveled with me there. We enjoyed a wonderful worship experience; even one of my mentors and some of our cousins who lived in the Detroit area came to worship with us. After worship we enjoyed a meal and then headed back to our hometown of Gary, Indiana. The next week was simple. I went to work and came home. I was living with my parents at the time, as I had just relocated back to the area graduating from college.

I went to choir rehearsal on Tuesday, Bible Study on Wednesday, and then church on Sunday morning, bringing us to Sunday, February 5. My father serves as pastor at my home church, Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church of Gary, Indiana. At the time, our church had two services, an 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., with Sunday School in-between. Worship that Sunday was phenomenal. We sang, and we shouted. The spirit of the Lord was in that place, and my father preached the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the end of worship, my mother did not look well. It seemed as if she could not catch her breath, and with a history of asthma, this was not out of the norm, but it was still unusual. My father's office is up behind the choir loft. He told my mom to go up there to catch her breath and relax. She made it up the stairs and then immediately passed

out. Just a week ago, she was fine. We had just enjoyed our trip to Detroit. She had no issues during the week, and now my mother was lying on the floor.

Ambulances were called, and she was rushed to hospital. Knowing her medical history of being an asthmatic, they begin to treat her breathing and lungs. My mother seemed better, and we felt that she would be coming home soon. However, one doctor, whose name I cannot remember, simply asked her one question, “How are you doing?” This doctor looked past her medical history, any test results, and what others had tried to figure out and simply asked, “How are you doing?” As my mother answered, one could not help but see the doctor's care and concern. After having this conversation with my mother, the doctor concluded that it must have been something other than her breathing that cause such a traumatic episode. Low and behold, it was not her asthma but a blockage in her heart. My mother did not need a breathing treatment; she needed bypass surgery.

Ten years later, my mother is still alive and well. She has the scar of the bypass procedure nevertheless; we will take the scar over a tombstone any day. However, this aside was not added because of God’s miracle-working power in healing my mother. This aside was added to show the care and concern of this unnamed doctor. No, we don’t remember his name. We do not know if he is still at the same hospital or if he is even still practicing medicine. However, what we do know is simple: he took the time to establish a system of care for my mother that was beyond the scope of X-rays, EKGs, blood work, and medical histories.

By tapping into the heart of my mother, the doctor developed a sense of community with her. She became more than just a patient; she was a person who needed

to be cared for. This is exactly the heart of this project. Pastors, their families, and lay leaders must be looked at beyond their titles. Just as my mother was Janice Culver before she was a patient, pastors, their families, and laity were people before their call or elevation in ministry. Moreover, as people, they also feel pain, strife, loneliness, distress, and discomfort. This was the case for Naomi in our biblical text. Furthermore, it was the same for persons who struggled for their freedoms and civil liberties in our historical foundation. Consequently, the church's desired role is to help and see these persons in our theological framework of ecclesiology. This system of care that looked at the “personhood” of my mother and not just her patient profile is known as Watson’s Theory of Care. We aim to examine how this theory intertwines with our project and all three foundations that bring this project together.

Watson’s Theory of Caring

Watson’s Theory of Care is a nursing theory that nursing professionals utilize throughout the entire world. The theory was developed by Jean Watson. According to the Watson Caring Science Institute, which was developed by Jean Watson, Dr. Watson is currently the Distinguished Professor of and Dean Emerita of, University of Colorado Denver, College of Nursing, Anschutz Medical Center campus, where she held the nation’s first endowed Chair in Caring Science for 16 years.”¹¹⁴ Dr. Watson is an accomplished author, and according to the institute, she currently holds 16 honorary doctoral degrees. Moreover, she has 13 international honorary doctoral degrees.

¹¹⁴ Dr. Jean Watson, “Dr. Jean Watson,” Watson Caring Science Institute, Last modified May 7, 2022, <https://www.watsoncaringscience.org/jean-bio/>.

The formulation of her theory is centered around the care of patients. She states in her book entitled, *Nursing: The Philosophy and Science of Caring*; “The word emerged from my quest to bring new meaning and dignity to the work and world of nursing and patient care.”¹¹⁵ Watson went on to say that “...the early work emerged from my own values, beliefs, perceptions, and experience with the rhetorical and ineffable questions.”¹¹⁶ Although I am not aware of the questions that Dr. Watson must have asked herself, they must have been centered on caring for not just a patient but also an individual.

In the book *Quality Caring in Nursing and Health*, the author states, “Just as relationships are an important aspect of human living, they are just as important during illness and hospitalization.”¹¹⁷ This is the center of Dr. Watson’s theory. Her theory has led to multiple books, articles, seminars, and training sessions to show those in the field of nursing that as they engage the whole person, they can increase the rate of healing both physically, mentally, and spiritually.

According to the article entitled, “Contributions of Jean Watson’s Theory to Holistic Critical Thinking of Nurses,” we learn the following about Dr. Watson’s theory.

Watson developed in her human care theory, ten charitable factors considered care needs specific to human experiences and that should be addressed by nurses: humanistic and altruistic values system; faith and hope; sensitivity to oneself and others; development of aid, trust and care relations; expression of positive and negative feelings and emotions; creative and individualized care process of troubleshooting; transpersonal teaching and learning; nurturing, protective and/or

¹¹⁵ Jean Watson, *Nursing: The Philosophy and Science of Caring* Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2008, 1.

¹¹⁶ Watson, *Nursing*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Joanne R. Duffy, *Quality Caring in Nursing and Health Systems: Implications for Clinicians, Educators, and... Leaders*, 3rd ed. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co., 2018, 60.

corrective, mental, physical, social and spiritual environment; assistance to human needs and existential-phenomenological and spiritual forces¹¹⁸

The charitable factors mentioned above are called her Caritas. These steps which do not necessarily need to be taken in order, help provide care for patients in need. However, not only do these steps help in patient care, but they are also great for the care of nurses and healthcare teams. As Komal Patel Murali states in her article that utilizes this theory, “The caritive factors are based on a moral, ethical, or philosophical foundation of “love and values””¹¹⁹ She goes on to say, “Watson purported that there are “multiple ways of knowing,” and this knowledge is attained through many avenues including, but not limited to, science, art, intuition, personal, culture, and spirituality.”¹²⁰ For Watson, these skills improved the quality of care and increased the value and rate of healing in patients.

Risk Factors of Watson’s Theory of Caring

As previously stated, Jean Watson’s work has been and continues to help those in the area of healing and the field of healthcare systems. Her work has been adopted by various hospitals, nursing homes, and even in some in-home care scenarios. Her work, as mentioned before, is centered around bringing a sense of humanness to the realm of healing. In the journal article, *Effects of a Mindfulness Activity on Nursing Service Staff Perceptions of Caring Behaviors in the Workplace*, the co-collaborators, including Dr. Watson, investigated how her theory helps even nursing staff. Through qualitative and

¹¹⁸ Fernando Riegel, Maria da Graca Oliveira Crossetti, and Diego Silveira Siqueira, “Contributions of Jean Watson’s Theory to Holistic Critical Thinking of Nurses,” *Revista Brasileira De Enfermagem* 71, no. 4 (2018): pp. 2072-2076, 2074.

¹¹⁹ Komal Patel Murali, “End of Life Decision-Making: Watson’s Theory of Human Caring,” *Nursing Science Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 2020): pp. 73-78, 75.

¹²⁰ Murali, 75.

quantitative research, they discovered that her theory works when put into practice properly. The article states the following: “The practice of mindfulness paired with caring behaviors can improve perceptions about relationships, enhance teamwork and workplace cohesiveness, increase positive feelings, and reduce stress.”¹²¹

Any good researcher must look at the positives and the negatives that may occur. Even though one may not want to use the word “negative” in their thought process or presentation, we can view them as obstacles or risk factors that one may need to take into serious consideration. Therefore, viewing Watson’s theory of care, we see risk as “buy-in.” A proper synonym for “buy-in” would be agreement, accession, or consent. In my research, I was able to see that if patients or providers do not have total “buy-in,” agree, or give consent, then Watson’s work is simply a good thought process. One writer states the following in working with Watson’s Theory of Care and Healing; “...professionals need to leave aside their judgments and prejudices and accept spirituality as a part of care despite the prevalence of the technical-scientific approach that permeates their educational backgrounds.”¹²²

They go on to say, “...it is considered fundamental for nurses to be open to new care practices which go beyond the paradigm of objectivity and biological care.”¹²³ It must be noted that although there is empirical evidence that it is successful and does work, Watson's work is on the affective spectrum. It deals with terms that look at a

¹²¹ Camille King et al., “Effects of a Mindfulness Activity on Nursing Service Staff Perceptions of Caring Behaviors in the Workplace,” *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 57, no. 11 (November 1, 2019): pp. 28-36, 35.

¹²² Ingrid Meireles Gomes et al., “Jean Watson's Theory of Transpersonal Caring in Nursing Home Care to Children: A Reflection,” *Escola Anna Nery* 17, no. 3 (August 1, 2013): pp. 555-561, 560.

¹²³ Gomes, 560.

person's state of mind and being rather than their medical prognosis only. The question that nurses and healthcare providers must wrestle with is the necessity of viewing the patient through this affective lens and, in doing so, does that skew their scientific knowledge and skill. For some, this could be a struggle if they are not taught the proper usage of Watson's theory in conjunction with scientific knowledge and proper nursing practice. Therefore, finding total "buy-in" may not be easy for all nursing and care providers.

Another risk or challenge for Watson's theory to be effective is that the culture of theory must be set in place within the nursing or care team. One author was able to apply Watson's theory to nursing staff and teams. In their research, they discovered the following: "When working with coworkers who are caring and supportive, team members feel the joy to work."¹²⁴ This is important in any area, not just with nurses or care teams. Regardless of the industry, people want to feel valued and appreciated. However, the issue at hand is that this cannot be from one worker to another, this must be built up through a sustainable and operative culture.

One might ask where the risk is; for healthcare workers, the risk or obstacle per se was establishing the culture. For Watson's theory of care to be appropriately applied, several in-services and classes must be developed, especially if the participants did not receive this information in their educational pursuits. To develop these classes and in-services, the two principles needed are time and money. Hospitals, nursing homes, and care teams will have to juxtapose the importance or value of the theory with time and

¹²⁴ Holly Wei and Jean Watson, "Healthcare Interprofessional Team Members' Perspectives on Human Caring: A Directed Content Analysis Study," *International Journal of Nursing Sciences* 6 (December 13, 2018): pp. 17-23, 22.

revenue. If management were to suggest that this is not necessary for the proper utilization of resources in the care of patients, it is possible that the culture may not be developed. Moreover, without the development of culture, “buy-in” and acceptance will be null and void. Yes, as the article stated, “Workplace culture and environments affect patient quality care.”¹²⁵ However, making a budget and allocating resources is an essential factor that managerial teams must consider.

Lastly, the final obstacle is the risk of “compassion fatigue.” In an online article entitled, *Compassion Fatigue: A Nurse Primer*, written in 2011, the collaborators looked at this theory of “compassion fatigue.” They state, “Empathetic caring and interpersonal skills are at the core of the nursing role. However, the cost of providing this empathic nursing care can contribute to caregiver compassion fatigue.”¹²⁶ To describe “compassion fatigue,” they state, “Compassion fatigue has been defined as a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for patients in significant emotional pain and physical distress. Although many definitions of compassion fatigue are now found in the literature, a nurse was the first to describe the concept in her work with emergency room personnel. She identified compassion fatigue as a unique form of burnout that affects individuals in caregiving roles.”¹²⁷

In the book *Combating Physician Burnout*, the writer states, “Three separate but related dimensions define professional burnout. These dimensions include emotional

¹²⁵ Wei, 22.

¹²⁶ Barbara Lombardo and Caryl Eyre, “Compassion Fatigue: A Nurse’s Primer,” *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, January 31, 2011, doi:10.3912/ojin.vol16no01man03.

¹²⁷ Lombardo.

exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment.”¹²⁸ The book goes on to show that this is a serious problem in the medical profession. Moreover, due to this, there can be an “increased risk of medical errors, poor performance and decreased medical empathy.”¹²⁹ This is certainly a significant risk to consider because stretching oneself to reach another in pain could cause pain in the other person. Depression can set in or other forms of sickness. This is not just a risk that can affect the culture, but it can deter the healing process or even cause a more significant sickness, if not death, to a patient or care worker.

Watson’s Theory of Care and Our Biblical Foundations

Dr. Watson’s Theory of Care was chosen due to its value to our overall culture and because it aligns with our project and the previous foundation papers. In our Biblical foundation paper, we examined the scripture passage of Ruth 1:16-22, which gives us a discourse between two matriarchal characters, Ruth and Naomi. As mentioned in our Biblical Foundation paper, we see that Ruth and Naomi both deal with the bitterness that life brings, Naomi the more. From the book's onset, Naomi and her family are visited with the pain of famine and forced relocation. The opening verse states the following, “In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he, and his wife and two

¹²⁸ Sheila M. LoboPrabhu, Richard F. Summers, and H. Steven Moffic, *Combating Physician Burnout: A Guide for Psychiatrists* Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2020, 66.

¹²⁹ LoboPrabhu, 67.

sons. The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's Naomi. The names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah."

Naomi is then met with the pain of becoming a widow. We find in the next portion of the text her husband, Elimelech dies. Losing a husband was a tough blow for her both physically, mentally, and socially. However, Naomi was able to persevere through it with the presence of her sons Mahlon and Chilion. As the boys grew into men, they both met and married women of Moab. Chilion married a woman named Orpah and Mahlon, our titular character, Ruth. However, as we continue through the scriptures, we find that these two sons die prematurely, and now Naomi is visited with the pain of losing both of her sons. The scripture says in Ruth 1:15, "both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two children and without her husband."

Now, please do not take it lightly that I am referring to the issues that face Naomi as pain. Considering Watson's Theory of Care, I see Naomi as a prime candidate to be called a "patient." Let us face it, she has been in mental anguish for over a period of time. Having to deal with a famine, forced relocation, and the death of her husband and sons must have placed her in a tough place. I am sure that if Naomi were alive today, she would have to have been admitted to some type of care facility. As we see in Ruth 1:20-21, She said to them, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara," she answered, "for the Almighty has made me very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has pronounced judgment on me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

One writer states, "...she [Naomi] describes herself as directly afflicted by the hand of God as one who can only bring further tragedy upon her daughter-in-law

[Ruth].”¹³⁰ Even in relation to Naomi returning to Bethlehem, another writer states the following: “But where Naomi had hoped to find comfort, her searing sense of loss and tears at her all the more strongly in the face of her memories.”¹³¹ Again, Naomi is a textbook patient in need of care. If we are to see Ruth as a nurse or healthcare worker, her actions align with Watson’s Theory of Care.

Now, according to Watson’s Theory of Care, we have, as mentioned before, the 10 Caritas Process. I believe Ruth’s response to Naomi in chapter one exemplifies at least two of the ten process steps given by Watson. The first step I would like to examine is step two, which Watson describes as “Being authentically present, enabling faith/hope/belief system; honoring subjective inner life-world of self/others.”¹³² According to Watson in her book, *Caring Science and Mindful Practice: Implementing Watson’s Human Caring Theory*, she states the following in accordance with step 2, “Being authentically present, instilling faith and hope, and honoring others require caring professionals to cultivate openness to and awareness of, alternative practices and beliefs.”¹³³

Ruth does this as she rebuffs all of Naomi’s commands to go back to her home country of Moab. Naomi took multiple attempts and rationales to persuade her daughters-

¹³⁰ George Savran, “The Time of Her Life: Ruth and Naomi,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 30, no. 1 (2016): pp. 7-23, 11.

¹³¹ Savran, 21.

¹³² Jean Watson, “10 Caritas Processes®,” Watson Caring Science Institute, Last modified July 19, 2022, <https://www.watsoncaringscience.org/jean-bio/caring-science-theory/10-caritas-processes/>.

¹³³ Kathleen Sitzman and Jean Watson, *Caring Science, Mindful Practice: Implementing Watson’s Human Caring Theory* New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co., 2014, 55.

in-law not to accompany her back to Bethlehem. If we look at Ruth 1:11-13, Naomi stated the following:

“But Naomi replied, “Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying?”

In response to this, Orpah decides to go back to Moab. According to the New American Commentary of Ruth, the writer states, “Orpah pursues a natural course; Ruth is determined to swim upstream.”¹³⁴ Ruth was determined to be present with Naomi and accept Naomi’s culture norms and beliefs as her own. The commentator goes on to suggest, “Far from abandoning Naomi, Ruth is determined to accompany her for the rest of her life and beyond.”¹³⁵ As we will see in the rest of the text, this determination is the first step in Naomi’s healing process. Ruth’s willingness to be authentically by her side helps her to heal because she did not return to Bethlehem empty; she returned with Ruth.

Not only can we see Ruth in step two, but we can also see Ruth in step eight of the Caritas process. Step suggests that we are to “Create a healing environment at all levels; subtle environment for energetic, authentic caring presence.”¹³⁶ Watson shares that this step involves “Helping-trusting-caring relationships [which] are central to the Caritas consciousness and require authenticity and genuineness of human connecting.”¹³⁷ We

¹³⁴ Daniel Isaac Block, *The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999, 638.

¹³⁵ Block, 641.

¹³⁶ Jean Watson, “10 Caritas Processes®,” Watson Caring Science Institute, Last modified July 19, 2022, <https://www.watsoncaringscience.org/jean-bio/caring-science-theory/10-caritas-processes/>.

¹³⁷ Sitzman, 75.

must note what Ruth tells Naomi in verses 16 and 17; “But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”

Ruth made a commitment to enter a healing environment with Naomi. She did not wish to return to Moab. Naomi, her people, and especially her God became her new environment, which would bring her healing as well. As one writer states, “At the outset, Naomi is emptied of all her resources (food, home, male support). But in the end, she experiences complete filling/fulfillment through a daughter-in-law declared by the women of the town to be more valuable than seven sons.”¹³⁸

Watson’s Theory of Care and Historical Foundations

Now, as Watson’s work can be fitted or understood in a biblical sense, it can also be adjoined to our historical foundation for this project. The historical foundation for this project was the role of African American women from the 1600s to the early part of the 20th century as they worked together in community to help in the early stages of the civil rights movement. As many were missionaries or worked together through women’s civil rights groups, their work together helped to propel the modern civil rights movement and bring hope to those who were in despair. Previously, we were able to view Naomi from our biblical foundation as a type of “patient” in need of care. Clearly, we can view African Americans during this as “patients” in need of care as well.

¹³⁸ Block, 604.

In just referring to the Middle Passage of how enslaved Africans made the journey from their homeland to the Americas, the writer Rinaldo Walcott states, “...although it was different for each slave, I see this crisis as a collective trauma for Black people specifically. The crossing of the Atlantic and the many deaths that occurred, denied Africans the opportunity to put their dead to rest in ways that accorded with their customs.”¹³⁹ However, even when the enslaved people did arrive in America, they did not find much comfort. Working long and laborious hours under threat of harm made life difficult.

As a matter of fact, laws were even created that made it legal to kill enslaved people in some colonial areas. In the book *Homicide Justified: The Legality of Killing Slaves in the United States and the Atlantic World*, the collaborators stated the following: “Lawmakers in colonial Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia adopted statutes that in different ways explicitly legitimized slave killings by masters, which would have been common law murders.”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, with this being stated, we can see that the African American males and females were under tremendous stress and duress during this time in their lives. Clearly, they would be just like Naomi and in need of care.

Now, in viewing Watson’s *Caritas*, I see the role of African American women who helped and served during this time in step six. Step six is outlined by Watson as “Creatively problem solving-solution seeking- through caring process; full of self and

¹³⁹ Rinaldo Walcott, “Middle Passage: In the Absence of Detail, Presenting and Representing a Historical Void,” *Kronos* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): pp. 59-68, 60.

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Fede, *Homicide Justified: The Legality of Killing Slaves in the United States and the Atlantic World* Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2017, 91.

artistry of caring healing practices via of all ways of knowing/being/doing/becoming.”¹⁴¹

She goes on to say in regard to this step that “To deeply understand any phenomenon requires observation from vantage points and then synthesis of all forms of evidence into a cohesive holistic picture of the event of interest.”¹⁴² This is the epitome of what Ida B. Wells does for the African American community.

The major way that African Americans were killed during this time was a process called lynching. Lynching was the killing of an African American person, most likely a male, by hanging on a tree. James Cone, in his book entitled *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, states, “The lynching tree is the most potent symbol of the trouble nobody knows that blacks have seen but do not talk about because of the pain of remembering – visions of black bodies dangling from southern trees, surrounded by jeering white mobs.”¹⁴³ He goes on to say, “In that era, the lynching tree joined the cross as the most emotionally charged symbol in the African American community.”¹⁴⁴

While living at the time in Memphis, Wells was certain to see this on a regular basis. Therefore, how did she and others participate in communal healing? Wells used her skills of research and writing learned from her time as a student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee to write articles to help people see the horrific things that were happening to her people. As one author stated, “From the late 1880s into the first decade of the twentieth century, the black press became more and more important as a voice in

¹⁴¹ Jean Watson, “10 Caritas Processes®,” Watson Caring Science Institute, Last modified July 19, 2022, <https://www.watsoncaringscience.org/jean-bio/caring-science-theory/10-caritas-processes/>.

¹⁴² Sitzman, 95.

¹⁴³ Cone, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Cone, 3.

the community.”¹⁴⁵ Wells and others used their talents to bring awareness and healing to the issues that their people faced, especially lynching.

In the book *Women of the Civil Rights Movement*, the author was able to show Wells’ work even persuaded Congress. The author states, “She [Wells] argued that lynching was based on economic reasons and that southern whites feared competition from education blacks.”¹⁴⁶ Her findings received the attention of African Americans who moved out of the Memphis area to present-day Oklahoma, as mentioned before Congress. The author states, “Wells efforts, however, and those of others, eventually persuaded Congress to consider antilynching laws.”¹⁴⁷ By using this vehicle, she is embodying the work outlined by Watson in step six of using multiple ways to bring healing through scientific research methods. Now, Wells was not able to get Congress to change or enact the law at that time. Yet this does not mean she was unsuccessful in bringing about healing for the community.

Watson’s Theory of Care and Our Theological Foundations

Finally, I believe that Watson’s Theory of Care aligns with our theological foundation of ecclesiology. In our theological foundations paper, we examine the meaning of ecclesiology and expounded upon Paull Tillich’s view of ecclesiology. To best give a synopsis of that foundation's paper, William Henn, in his book entitled *Church: The People of God*, gives us a clear understanding of the church and a proper

¹⁴⁵ Shawn Leigh Alexander, *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Anne Wallace Sharp, *Women Civil Rights Leaders* Detroit, MI: Lucent Books, 2013, 21.

¹⁴⁷ Sharp, 22.

view of ecclesiology. He states, “The church was fashioned from the side of Jesus Christ as he hung on the cross so that it might believe and hand on his word, celebrate and help believers mature in his life and serve as an instrument for the continuation of his mission to establish God’s kingdom.”¹⁴⁸

Clearly a part of that kingdom was to help those in need. Jesus declares this in Luke 4:18-21; the scripture reads from the Good News Translation;

“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. He began by saying to them, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.”

Now we can clearly see those who are blind, poor, captive, and oppressed can also be considered patients, just like Naomi and African Americans or other minorities who have faced discrimination and marginalization. So, where does Watson’s Theory of Care fit in when it comes to the areas of ecclesiology and the church? I believe that ecclesiology and the church fall into Step 9 of the Caritas process. Step 9 states from the Watson Caring Science Institute website, “Reverentially assisting with basic needs as sacred acts, touching mind body spirit of other; sustaining human dignity.”¹⁴⁹ Watson goes on to explain this by stating, “Each of us is made of many elements, and Caritas nurses are called to honor those elements. Nurses help others manage predicaments related to the fact that human spirits reside in human bodies.”¹⁵⁰ In my opinion I believe that Watson’s

¹⁴⁸ William Henn, *Church: The People of God* London: Burns & Oates, 2004, 21.

¹⁴⁹ Jean Watson, “10 Caritas Processes®,” Watson Caring Science Institute, Last modified July 19, 2022, <https://www.watsoncaringscience.org/jean-bio/caring-science-theory/10-caritas-processes/>.

¹⁵⁰ Sitzman, 121.

goal in step nine is for nurses and caring professionals to reach the heart and spirit of the patient and bring not only physical care but spiritual as well. This is the role of the church.

The church is not just a place where we are to regurgitate and repeat scriptural information. It is a place of community and a place filled with persons who are committed to helping others heal spiritually through the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know this to be true in my community. The church is the center of the African American community. It has been and still is a mecca of healing. One writer states the following about the church: “Historically, religion and faith communities have performed important roles in promoting health and well-being in African Americans and in the development of the black communities.”¹⁵¹

So, does the church provide healing? The answer is emphatically yes. More than just healing of the soul but also of the mind, body, and spirit from the “blind, poor, and oppressed.” In another article entitled “We’ve Come This Far by Faith: The Role of the Black Church in Public Health,” the collaborators state the following, “Since its inception, the Black church has been a place of refuge and healing for the oppressed, marginalized and remains a gateway to reach and mobilize African Americans for meaningful change and reform.”¹⁵² Simply put, the church is a place that is designed for healing, to bring about healing, and to propitiate healing in the name of Jesus Christ. Proper ecclesiology is to care for the soul, just as Watson desires from nursing

¹⁵¹ Meredith O Hope et al., “Church Support Among African American and Black Caribbean Adolescents,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 28, no. 11 (November 2019): pp. 3037-3050, 3038.

¹⁵² LaPrincess C. Brewer and David R. Williams, “We’ve Come This Far by Faith: The Role of the Black Church in Public Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 3 (March 2019): pp. 385-386, 385.

professionals. We do this by having many gifts and talents given to us by God to help bring about koinonia. One writer stated, “The church [is] as charismatic community which is reference to the gifts or abilities that God has bestowed to the individuals within the church to fulfil some special service.”¹⁵³

Conclusion

As stated before, I saw for myself that Watson’s Theory of Care does work. It saved the life of my mother, and I know that it did the same for others. By taking the time to “see” the patient and not just “see” a patient can change the trajectory of the care or even healing that a person receives. Moreover, as pastors and laity are practitioners, even called “Doctors of the Church” we too need the same care as a patient receives. We are hurt. We are worn down. We are at times discontented, and we need persons in our community who do not see us simply as the practitioner but the patient who has a name, a heart, and a soul.

Clearly in the formation of this project, Watson’s Theory of Care intertwines with our additional foundations’ sources. It can be applied to our biblical narrative of Ruth, our historical viewpoint of African American women and their communal help during the civil rights movement, and it is the essence of ecclesiology at work. Of course, Watson’s theory is not foolproof. There are risks involved. However, there are risks involved with everything. We must recognize the risks and provide checkpoints to handle them properly. Nevertheless, the risk of poisonous, toxic, and venomous “Doctors of the

¹⁵³ Vhuamni Magezi and Patrick Nathambwe, “Development and the Role of the Church’ Exploring Public Pastoral Care Positioning Within Congregational Ministry,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (May 5, 2022), doi:<https://doi.org/10.4102/we.v43i1.2414>, 15.

Church” far outweighs the risks involved with the application of Watson’s Theory of Care.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

If I were to rank my favorite bible passages, or as in the current culture give a “Mount Rushmore” of the top bible scriptures in my life, Isaiah 40 would be on the list. The Bible says in verse 28, “*Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never grows faint or weary; there is no limit to His understanding.*”¹⁵⁴ Warren Wiersbe, in his commentary on the passage, stated.

“Instead of seeing the open door, the Jews saw only the long road before them, and they complained that they did not have strength for the journey. God was asking them to do the impossible. But God knows how we feel and how we fear, and He is adequate to meet our every need. We can never obey God in our own strength, but we can always trust Him to provide the strength we need.”¹⁵⁵

This is exactly how I felt during the formation of this project. The overall goal of my doctoral studies has been centered around the impact of community. From my spiritual autobiography to my contextual analysis, I was able to see that community was the heart of my existence and at the heart of my church purpose. At the onset, I focused on the lack of community or the need for community among pastors. In the past few years, we have been inundated with data concerning pastoral burnout. In a 2010 article,

¹⁵⁴ Isaiah 40:28 HCSB

¹⁵⁵ 1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted: Feeling Secure in the Arms of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 132.

Diane Chandler shared the following: “Research has shown that the average pastor works between fifty and sixty hours per week, spends limited time in personal spiritual formation activity, and lacks a close personal friend or support-accountability network.”¹⁵⁶

Additionally, Wayne Cordeiro in his book entitled, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion*, examined what happens with leaders who give it their all and beyond. He stated, “Depression takes the place of initiative, your indecision and anxiety increase. You begin to feel a greater need for aloneness and isolation.”¹⁵⁷ All of these words and the additional information that was found were, in my opinion, needed to help pastors build the necessary communal walls to help them be what God called them to be. However, God began to lead in another direction. Every pastor I approached to give me their time saw the value of the project and its necessity. However, time and time again, I was left with the words “NO.”

This was very interesting because if there were any persons who needed help it must be pastors. However, just as in the parable of the feast, people simply became too busy. Too busy to take interest and go beyond the veil and see how they can be better practitioners in the Lord’s church. Yet here I was, at the brink of becoming a doctor of the church, and now I was stuck. However, even though this was taking place, it was not a “dead end.” God was just sending me in a different direction. Nevertheless, I believe in the words of Dr. Wierbse; God was asking me to do the impossible, and He was leading

¹⁵⁶ Diane J. Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors’ Spiritual Practices on Burnout,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 2 (June 2010): 1–9, 1.

¹⁵⁷ Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 19.

me to a place that, if I trusted, it would provide all that was needed. In so many words, God shifted my project. Personally, I felt betrayed that God would not allow my project to go forward as I had planned. To think, I labored with this thought process for five semesters, two and half years, precis assignments, foundation papers, and focus groups, only to be shifted by the Holy Spirit.

The shift came about through dialogue with my mentors. After spending time telling them my situation and coming up with alternatives that were not approved, they asked me whether I thought about using my church context. Initially, I did not view my church context as a viable place for my project. Nevertheless, after prayer, I started to see what God was doing. He moved me from focusing on a reluctant community to a “community” that was ready, willing, able, and in need of repair. About eight years ago, I was called to serve my church, the Jerusalem Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Most recently, I encountered persons in our church community who had not attended church for some time. The longest absence from a family in this community was over thirty years. Nevertheless, they began to recommit themselves back to our church community. Not only this one family mentioned, but several others within the last year have re-engaged in our church community.

One would suggest that they were always Christians. They believed in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were baptized and attended discipleship training classes such as Sunday School and Bible Study. They were givers and believed in the power of prayer but were disengaged from our church community. Then, I began to see how God was redirecting me to trust him. Our church community was hurting

because there were those who were “lost,” and no one sought or had the skills to redirect them back to their church community.

I believe that many churches take Matthew 9:37-38 seriously as Jesus says, “*Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*”¹⁵⁸

Yet they forget what Jesus does in Luke 15 and seeks to reclaim that which has been lost.

I believe that some traumatic experience has allowed persons in this community to disengage from the local church. Moreover, as I looked back through the foundation papers written, each area dealt with this. Ruth and Naomi dealt with tragedy. African American women responded to the tragedy of segregation and marginalization. Paul Tillich dealt with the tragedy of exile. Moreover, Watson’s theory of care is designed to respond to people experiencing tragedy. The following project took the opportunity to train local church leaders on the necessary reasons and ways to help rebuild this community by re-engaging those who were “lost.”

Methodology

As mentioned in our introduction, our project’s first focus was to use pastors in the surrounding community. However, the change was made to utilize persons in my church community. Therefore, letters of introduction were created and were given to fourteen persons of my church context. For some, they were active ministry leaders, while others were members who served in the church. Each person was chosen carefully. No person was asked who was a new convert or transplant member. Each person selected

¹⁵⁸ Matthew 9:37-38 HCSB

was in fact a member with a great and expansive history with the church. For some they had been a part of the church for over fifty years, while most have been a part of the church for at least twenty to thirty years.

I approached each participant via in-person dialogue or phone call. During this time they were notified of what the project was about and asked to join in an informational session. All persons expressed interest in joining the project. Outside of being members of their church and loving their pastor, once they learned some of the critical parts of the project, they became intrigued to see what it was about. Unfortunately, during the selection process, one of the participants unexpectedly died. This proved to be a trying time for both me and other participants. Our participant who passed died three days before the first informational session. They were an intrinsic part of our church community, and their death took a toll on us all. Nevertheless, we persevered through the situation.

Another person was reached out to prior to the informational session and accepted the possibility of taking our deceased member's place. At the informational session, all participants came and there was a dinner provided to allow for the participants to feel at ease. We participated in some icebreakers and prayer activities. In our icebreaker activities, we made a correlation between who we were and music. Participants were asked to write three songs: one identifying the year or decade in which they were born/grew up, one identifying how their day went, and one identifying their favorite gospel song. In doing so, the participants became more of a group and began to learn more about each other. This also proved to be an opportunity to break the tension in the air as some still were trying to figure out the project's purpose.

All participants were then given a pre-survey questionnaire. To help maintain anonymity, each person received a participant number that only the other participant and I knew. The pre-survey questionnaire contained questions to ascertain basic information about the participants. The basic information included knowing their age and gender. These two questions were asked to help us identify which age group or gender responded in which way. For example, it is possible for women to answer a question in a different light than men. On the other hand, it is also possible for someone who is a “baby boomer” to answer a question differently than someone who is a “millennial,” “Generation X” or “Generation “Z.”

After seeking their basic information, we sought to learn about their leadership role in our church context and how long they had served in that capacity. Even though this answer was already somewhat known, having this information helped to be able to “read the room” and understand the participants more. Next, participants were asked about their level of theological training, which was slim or moderate. Finally, participants were asked the following two questions. The first is, “In your own opinion, do you believe people do not attend church because of hardship/stress?” To your knowledge, have you seen a fellow church member's attendance or participation dwindle because of hardship/stress they are facing?

In my opinion, the final two questions of the survey were the most pertinent, as these two questions focused on the project's hypothesis. I believe that persons have disengaged from the church due to some form of trauma. This trauma could be but is not limited to church hurt, divorce, loss of income, sickness, or any other form of distress. I believe these items and others can hurt persons to the point that they can walk away from

the local church. This does not mean they are not Christians, become atheists, or lack some level of spirituality. These persons are simply hurt. Seeing if participants understand or have seen this will help gauge their understanding of the issue.

Furthermore, answering the question would awaken the participants' metacognition.

One author stated, “The superior teacher naturally causes students to be aware of their own learning and to be strategic and reflective about that learning. This thoughtful student reflection, in turn, fosters creative application and transfer of ideas as students bridge learning into their everyday lives.”¹⁵⁹ The final questions of the questionnaire allowed participants to think about the congregation outside of their lens. It forced them to look at the empty pews and missing faces to see if it was possible for these persons to step away due to some form of trauma or a traumatic episode. This would, in turn, give more credence to the entire project.

Now, to convey our material, we utilized a bible study/workshop model. The first session, as mentioned before, was geared to introduce the project to the participants. I took the opportunity to explain the Doctor of Ministry process to all the participants. I explained the parameters of my focus group and gave information regarding my mentors. I then gave an overview of my spiritual autobiography and the research accomplished in my contextual analysis document. By doing this, all were able to see my heart for the project and the hard work that was put in. In my opinion, they were able to see that this was serious business.

I then proceeded to briefly give an overview of each foundation paper and explained that this would be the focus of the rest of the workshops. After which, I opened

¹⁵⁹ Robin Fogarty and Brian M. Pete, *Metacognition: The Neglected Skill Set for Empowering Students* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2020), 12.

the floor for questions to gauge the hearts and minds of the participants. Again, as mentioned I utilized a bible study/workshop method for each additional session. In doing so, I created a PowerPoint/slide presentation based on each foundation paper. I believe this was the most effective way to complete the project as many participants are accustomed to the method as they attend our weekly bible study classes.

Each presentation had an opening activity to allow each participant to get to know others in the room. Before this, some participants did not or would not have taken the opportunity to get to know other people in the room. Even though our church is relatively small, church does have its cloister communities. I intentionally wanted to break through this so that people could see the need for community and the benefit of it as well. In one of the sessions, persons testified how they now developed relationships they necessarily would not have if it weren't for the project. For me, it was very important for this to happen because how would one seek to help those reengage back into the local fellowships if they were not willing to even engage with those currently a part of our fellowship that they see every week?

After each session, participants were also given journal questions. These were questions that reviewed some parts of the lesson that was given at that session. Participants received no more than two questions per session and were asked to answer them and return at the beginning of the next session. At some sessions, we also had fellowship opportunities with food brought in by either the entire group or me as a form of a potluck. Again, this was intentional to continue to build community and see the value of it. In session four, participants completed in-person interviews with me. Each person completed their interview between sessions four and seven. The interview questions were

listed on IRB, but I also asked questions based on the responses given by the participants. This proved to be very valuable as the participants began to speak candidly about how they felt about the subject matter and its correlation with the church community.

Implementation

Project Participants

As aforementioned, the context of this project was the Jerusalem Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Fourteen persons were selected and joined through the entire project process. All persons are members of Jerusalem and have been a part of the church in some form or fashion for at least ten years or more. The average age of the participants was 52 years old, with thirteen participants being women and one male. All persons were involved in the church in different forms, ranging from volunteers, members of the choir, ushers, or nurses (healthcare) ministers. To even some who were deaconesses and former or current church trustees.

When asked about theological training, no person had formal theological training. However, many did mention how they were active in or had at least been to church workshops, bible study lessons, and Sunday School classes. As a part of their initial survey, two questions were asked that helped prepare participants for future discussions. The first was, "In your opinion, do you believe people do not attend church because of some form of hardship/stress they are facing." Participant #31 stated, "Yes, for some people, it is easier for them to stay home when hardship comes rather than be among people." Participant #50 stated, "No, these older members can stop persons based on the way they react to them." While Participant #32 stated, "Sometimes." In paraphrasing,

their response was still centered around the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused a layer of stress that was not present in the local church 10-30 years ago, which has affected church attendance.

The second question was, “To your knowledge, have you seen a fellow church member's attendance or participation dwindle because of hardship/stress they are facing?” In response, Participant #4 stated, “Not to my knowledge.” Participant #64 spoke about how a person's medical issues led to divorce, which was stressful enough to push them away from the church. Several other participants spoke of how the church dealt with a church split about ten years ago that still affected attendance. Along with the initial questionnaire, all participants also participated in private interviews, which we will discuss during our summation portion of this project.

Contextual & Professional Associates

For this doctor project, two contextual associates were used. The first was Pastor Byron Calhoun. Pastor Byron Calhoun has been a friend and ministry partner since 2007. Pastor Calhoun and I met when we were both associate ministers and youth pastors in Little Rock, Arkansas. Currently, he serves as the Pastor of the St. John Baptist Church of Lonoke, Arkansas. In his role as Pastor, he has also begun a community initiative called “Church at the Club.” “Church at the Club” is an initiative that is literally what it stands for in name. Pastor Calhoun hosts church services at local clubs in the Little Rock area. Not just because he is a friend, but I also believe that Pastor Calhoun is reaching a community that generally would not come into a church context. Pastor Calhoun is pressing the envelope and doing something outside of the box.

For session two, we were able to merge our historical foundation and the work that Pastor Calhoun is doing. As you will see in our synopsis of session three, it was demonstrated that Pastor Calhoun's methodology was like that of African American women before the civil rights movement. We demonstrated how each, both in the past and now in the present, utilized creative methods to help their community. The African American women did so for theirs, and Pastor Calhoun is doing so to help those who still believe in God connect with him somehow. During the session, Pastor Calhoun even provided a short video presentation to help show the participants the purpose, plan, and success of Church at the Club. He was able to demonstrate how he came to the idea and provided actual footage of a service as well.

Our second contextual associate was Ms. Crystal Perry. Ms. Perry is a licensed mental health/wellness professional here in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She is the owner and proprietor of Uniquely You Counseling & Wellness Center LLC. I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Perry through church affiliations here in our community and asked her to help us begin a grief counseling ministry here in our church context. Even though she does not currently attend our church, Ms. Perry grew up in our church as a child and into her formative years. As you will see, Ms. Perry skillset was utilized in our project during session seven. In that session, Ms. Perry was our lead teacher and presented a workshop on stress. The goal of her presentation was to help participants understand how persons can face traumatic experiences and what they will need to do to cope with them. One of the ways that she outlined was the need for community. Now, her teaching and action plan were helpful in this study.

Ms. Perry was able to show that people face traumatic and stressful situations daily. This points to the heart of our hypothesis, as she showed that withdrawal is one of the effects of stress. Participants were able to make the connection between this and how persons may have stepped away from our church fellowship. Moreover, some participants were able to testify that this is how they felt at some time.

In the area of professional associates, we had three. The first was Dr. Lloyd Hervey. Dr. Lloyd Hervey is a retired teacher and, most recently, retired professor of education from Philander Smith College (now Philander Smith University). Dr. Hervey became my mentor as I matriculated through the education program there to receive my undergraduate degree. Our second professional associate is Dr. Juliana Mosley. I met Dr. Mosely when she served as the Vice President of Student Affairs at Philander Smith. Moreover, like Dr. Hervey, Dr. Mosely has been a true mentor. Dr. Hervey and Dr. Mosely served in an oversight capacity with the formulation and writing of this project.

Our third professional associate was Dr. Marrisa S. Culver. Dr. Culver is the former Marrisa Mitchell, whom I've had the pleasure of knowing for the last twenty years as friends and the last ten as husband and wife. Dr. Culver is a medical professional at a local clinic in the area and possesses a doctorate in nursing practice from Valparaiso University. Dr. Culver's expertise was utilized in the writing of our final foundation paper with the suggestion of the nursing theory of Watson's Theory of Care. This became our interdisciplinary foundation and showed how the church uses this practice to better our community culture. This became a part of session six. Dr. Culver's expertise in this area helped formulate the foundation paper and the slide presentation for session six.

Project Sessions

For session two, we began introducing our findings from the doctoral project by starting with our biblical foundation. Our biblical foundation was based on the story of Ruth, and Naomi found in Ruth 1. However, before beginning our study, each person was asked to take a moment for meditation. Before our coming together, we, as a group, funeralized one of our group members. Again, this was a challenging moment for our church as this person was an integral part of our church leadership team and a strong volunteer. I felt it best to allow everyone to center themselves on Christ as we began our time together. Following that moment of meditation, each person took out a sheet of paper and participated in the opening activity entitled “Three Things”.

In this activity, participants were asked to record three things that fit the topic given by the instructor. The three topics were vacation destinations, famous persons you have met or would like to meet, colors you would not wear, food you never eat or never again, and how you felt on the worst day of your life. Of course, the first inquiries were ancillary to our discussion, but the last was germane to where our discussion was leading. For the question, “How did you feel on the worst day of your life?” participants responded with the words; “Cheated”; “devasted”; “mad at God”; “felt as though I lost everything,” and several others.

This was done so to help put participants in the mindset of where Naomi is in our biblical foundation story. Participants needed to see that just as they felt like this, so did others in the community who, for some reason, have walked away from the local church.

A direct quote from the lesson states:

We (the local church) have a tendency to believe that if a person doesn’t come to church, they are.... Bad people; Non-believers; Backsliders or on there way to

Hell so why bother. However, this is not always the case. Just because a person doesn't attend church doesn't mean they are not a believer. However, I do believe it means that some adverse problem has pushed them away from the local church.

Participants were able to see that Naomi had not given up on God yet, but if Ruth had not followed the urging of God's spirit to assist Naomi, she might have. Thus, the overall goal was to help participants to see that there were those in our community who had or were on the brink of giving up. However, we can be a "Ruth" to them and help them navigate their issues.

At the end of these sessions, two questions were asked. The first, *"Have you at any time felt like Naomi in Ruth? How did it make you feel, and what did you do to cope with the situation."* Participant #28 stated, "I felt like Naomi when my husband died. I felt alone, angry, and wondering how I could raise three boys by myself." Participant #31 stated, "Yes, I have at a time in my life felt like Naomi. I felt alone, broken, empty, and mad." Another participant spoke about how they dealt with prejudice at a place of employment.

The second question was, "Have you ever had a "Ruth" in your life? How did that person help you cope with what you were facing?" Participant #28 stated, "My family was a big help, particularly my mother-in-law and sister-in-law. They helped me keep the boys, keeping us close by family dinners and get-togethers." Participant #31 stated, "Yes, there were several persons. Each one had a different role in my life and situations at the time...to this day, we remain prayer partners."

For session three, we moved to our historical foundation document. For our historical foundation, we moved to examine the role of African American Women before the Civil Rights Movement. Participants were made aware of the New Orleans Sisters of

the Holy Family, African American Women in the American Missionary Society, and Victoria Earle. A direct quote from the presentation stated, “At that time, these ladies used INVENTIVE ways to aid and support their community. The church must do the same in winning souls for Christ.”

To show a contemporary use of inventive ministry, we watched a video from my contextual associate, Pastor Byron Calhoun. As mentioned, Pastor Calhoun operates what is known as “Church at the Club.” When participants saw this, many were taken aback as our church context is a traditional setting. Participant #32, who also serves in another church context, stated that they have seen where another church has an additional contemporary service that attracts those who would not necessarily come to the more traditional service. Nevertheless, when asked, many declined that they would attend a church at the club. As a matter of fact, many participants reminisced about how there was a church that formed in a club that never materialized in the area due to its origin.

However, they all agreed that Pastor Calhoun was inventive and able to help those who were “lost.” To close the lesson, there were four pillars to help the participants see how to be inventive. Students were then asked to complete their journal entries for this session. This session’s question was: “Based on today’s lesson, how have you been called to help your local church/community? What inventive things can your church do to win souls?” Participant #85 stated, “My calling is to shelters...” Participant #91 alluded to how they are called to be a person of prayer and a witness for God. However, they shifted the focus to those who are younger to help them become stronger Christians so that they can reach others for Christ. Participant #4 stated, “I honestly don’t know, but I am praying that God would reveal it to me.”

For session four, we moved to our theological foundation of ecclesiology and the work of Paul Tillich. However, to begin this session, we started with a group activity. Persons were paired at random into three groups. Moreover, each group received the following items: wooden coffee stirrers, tape, string, and a marshmallow. The goal for each group was to construct a tower using the items. The winner would be the group whose tower was the tallest. By far this was probably the most active that each participant was as they worked together to build these towers. In retrospect, I was able to see how each participant was valued and the ideas were utilized to build the tower. Many participants gained a better bond with each other because of the activity. The joy of the challenge was to show that we are all a church family. As we went through the discussion, participants were bonding and were actually “being the church.”

In session five, we focused on the interdisciplinary foundation of “Watson’s Theory of Care.” As with session two, we began with an opening activity by asking each person to bring a picture or pictures that represent you and you and your family. As people took their pictures, whether physical or electronic, on their phones or mobile devices, they were to answer the following questions: “Why did you choose this picture?”; “What does this picture remind you of?” and “What does this picture mean to you?” Participants were placed into groups and spent about 10-15 minutes dialoguing.

Once the time elapsed, participants were reminded that we are as the church are not just called to be devoted to the calling of Christ, but in that calling, we are called to be brothers and sisters. Simply put, the church is a family. As family members, we know each other, remember critical milestones, and build relationships. However, participants

were then challenged to answer the following questions

Introduction

- **Outside of persons in this room do you**
 - **Know the name of 10 church members?**
 - **Remember the birthday of 5 members?**
 - **Know things about other members?**
 - **Built a relationship with persons outside of your circle.?**

As many participants wondered, they were unable to answer the questions given.

We then took the time to show that failure to do so develops an aristocracy in the local church, where a few carry the church together and does not operate like a family, which is outside of the will of God. Participants were led to Ephesians 2:11, “So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household.” They were then shown how to better themselves by learning from Watson’s Theory of Care. Participants received vital knowledge about the theory and even watched video clips of how the theory is enacted in hospitals and healthcare systems. Participants then began to brainstorm on how this theory can be implemented in the local church to help us grow and reengage those back into the local church who have stepped away for whatever reason.

For session six, a guest teacher, our contextual associate, Ms. Crystal Perry, greeted participants. Ms. Perry took the time to speak about how to understand stress and

how to manage it best. Her time with the group, as outlined previously, was needed so that they would be able to see the connection between stress and lack of church membership. One of the significant things that Ms. Perry focused on was how stress affects all areas of life. The question was asked of her: How can we know if a person is stressed or is dealing with hardship? Her response was the need to get to know them. We will miss the triggers or cues that a person may give if we are not in community. Getting to know a person is critical to help them with their stress.

For the final session, participants took the time to review the impact of the doctoral project on their lives, which we will examine through the summation. However, all participants gave five takeaways. These takeaways are listed below.

Takeaways

- **Healthy**
- **Willing**
- **Motivated**
- **Spiritual**
- **Strong Christian Leadership**

Summary

Overall, I believe that the hypothesis held for this project. Participants were able to see and realize the possibility of how people can and have dealt with some traumatic episode that can push them away from the Lord's church, as Naomi did. Nevertheless,

suppose we are a community of believers. In that case, we can help them reengage back into the local church through the three areas outlined by the foundation papers, being the church (ecclesiology), caring for others, and developing inventive ministry methods that will help in their re-engagement.

Now, it is sad to say that, overall, no person has a concrete idea of how we can have inventive ministry methods. Nevertheless, during the interview process, I was able to gain information that helped me in this area. As we went through the one-on-one interviews, there were five pillars that stood out to me in my reflection. The first, which is in no form a categorical order, was the need for “Strong Christian Leadership.” The context in which Jerusalem was in was always successful when there was strong Christian leadership, especially from the standpoint of the pastor. Through this project, I was able to see that the people of this context supported or believed in the vision of the pastor.

As I stated before, no concrete ideas came up when asked about inventive ministry methods. However, some believed that if this were the pastor's vision, the church would support it. This shows that in this context or others, if pastoral leadership has no affinity for those no longer attending, it is impossible for the church to have it as well. For me, this showed that pastors ought to be willing to reach out to former members or non-church members and those in the fold. In this area, we must remember what Jesus does in Luke 15 with the lost sheep. He shows us that the shepherd goes to find the sheep. If we, as pastors, are not interested in finding the sheep, then we cannot expect the congregation to do so as well.

Now the idea of strong Christian leadership was twofold that was presented by the participants. The first was leadership, which is strong in faith and not abusive. One participant spoke of when a pastor was verbally discouraging because of this episode, they had no desire to continue to serve in a leadership capacity. Their lack of willingness to serve could be an impediment to the church ministry and was based on a traumatic episode before the current pastor's arrival. The second view was that of integrity. Several participants spoke about how pastors in our community had done things that put a “black eye” on the local church. Many participants were seniors, and they recognized that previous generations were long suffering with pastors due to their indiscretions, but this is no longer the case. The current church culture cannot and will not stand for or with pastors living outside of God's grace.

The second pillar that was brought out was the need for a healthy church. As mentioned, this church context dealt with a church spilt before our arrival and a major church fight before that. In my estimation, there was a ten-year stretch in which the church was in turmoil. Some persons who were in the group left because of unhealthy practices that had taken place. Participants helped me to see that there is a crowd of people looking for churches to attend, but they will not participate in or stay in an unhealthy church environment.

Churches that are not accepting, kind, or loving will not be able to help reengage persons back into the sheepfold. During one interview, a participant spoke about how no one in the church even cared to contact them during the hard time of losing a loved one. As we met back as a group, this idea came out during our session. Many participants said they would not care if someone reached out to them. However, when this one participant

stated they did care, it was as if a light bulb went off. Many were able to acknowledge their shortcomings in promoting an unhealthy church environment, and this must change to reengage the lost.

The third pillar given was a willing congregation. This came from an individual who at one point, stepped away and reengaged back to the church during my tenure. Their take on the matter was inciteful because they were initially inclined to step away at the onset of the project. To this individual, the time commitment and work needed to complete the task at hand seemed too much. Moreover, in the personal interview, they expressed their feelings. Nevertheless, through the encouragement of others, they consented to stay. They became willing to be a part of this project and believed that what we were trying to accomplish could not take place if others were not willing to do so.

Reaching out to the lost is not easy. Especially in this anti-church era which makes it extremely difficult to do and have a functioning evangelism ministry. The heart of each foundational document is that of willingness. Ruth was willing to help Naomi. Paul Tillich was willing to be a part of the Lord's church. Victoria Earle was willing to help those in need. Moreover, nurses and medical professionals are willing to put their egos and thoughts aside to help those in need. The same can be said for the local church.

Nevertheless, the local church must also be motivated. Many participants over age 75 felt that the motivation should be left up to those who were younger. Then, they seemed to share that this dialogue that they entered was good but was more suited for those who are Millennials or Generation Z. Now I understand the urgency of this as this church context has more people who are in the "winter" season of their life than those

who are in their spring or summer. However, this cannot be motivation for the church to get younger or use young people.

The motivation must be the church to be the church. Participant #64 was a prime example of this idea of motivation. Personal trauma in this participant's life allowed them to become more active in the church context. As the personal trauma took place, others and I found ourselves just being the church. Not seeking to add another member, find another worker, or get “younger.” We just simply were doing what Jesus would do. In doing so, this participant has become reengaged in the church fellowship.

When we spoke to participant #64 about this, they conveyed the following. When persons are motivated to be the church, without other alternative motives, persons will gradually become a part of our church body. This gradual work will take place organically and they will become rooted in the fellowship. This response from them reminded me of our focus group session that spoke about evangelism. One of the presentations stuck with me talked about how people want to connect before they join. The motivation cannot be making new members but expanding the kingdom. To do the opposite will run this new generation of potential believers away.

The final pillar participants shared was the need for a higher level of spirituality. Two participants in general spoke highly of this as their heart was grieved by the fact that little to none continuously joined the church for public prayer meetings. While another focused on the fact that little to none of the church context joined for Christian discipleship training. When asked was this a problem before the church stress of splitting or due to the current pastorate, both showed this was not due to either. Nonetheless, this has been a problem of this church context for as long as they knew it.

A church context that has no spiritual foundation is oxymoronic, but it is possible. In my honest opinion, the local church, in all contexts, has struggled with being business pragmatists rather than being the spiritual leaders that God has called us to be. Failure to pray and be the disciples that God called us to be will take us away from the clarion call of going into his vineyard and reaching the lost. We become like Orpah, unwilling to go forward in faith and run the risk of our local assemblies being forgotten and never mentioned again. Persons who are not spiritual do not see the need to reengage those who are lost and castigate the persons to be the dregs of society when all they need is help.

By receiving this information through the interview process, I was pleasantly pleased with the effect this had on the participants. In our final session, we had a chance to talk about the Sunday sermon before class. The previous Sunday's message focused on how the early church grew through the work of those in Antioch. There, in Acts 15, Barnabas reengaged a lost person in Saul, who was simply sitting on the sideline in Tarsus. This message was not preached on purpose, but when we analyzed how the message was rooted in our seminar sessions, the participants understood and agreed. I believe they see the need and are willing to do the work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe the best part of this project was twofold. The first is listening to the voice of God. I'll never forget that my mentor, Dr. Herbert Miller, asked me a trick question at the beginning of my Doctor of Ministry journey. In our first focus group, he asked me what my project would be about. My response was, I have no idea, and he said you are correct. He was showing me and the other first-semester students that

this is a journey, and to come to this journey with a preconceived notion of what you desire to do pushes out the voice of God, and you only listen to your own.

I had a plan, but God spoke, and I listened. Now, I do believe that I will eventually get to work on some academic studies on pastors and their mental health and well-being. I think it is needed and will help us both in the academy and the sanctuary. But at this season in my life, God was leading me in a different area, and I listened to His voice, not my own. By listening to His voice, I was able to see the bigger picture and see that there is a new group of people who are attempting to reengage the Lord's church. For some traumatic reason, they left and walked away from the assembly but not from Him. Yet they see the need now to be a part of the Lord's church. However, if we are not healthy, willing, and spiritual enough in our communities to receive them, they will not enter.

The second item that went well was the willingness of the participants. Several entered this journey because I serve as their pastor. Due to allegiance, they were willing to give their time, effort, and mind space to be used. A couple did not want to continue, but I believe that they remained either through the urging of the Holy Spirit or sheer curiosity. However, in remaining I saw a change in them. Those who were on the fringes moved in their commitment to their church and gained a better perspective on what God is doing in the life of our church family. I am forever grateful to them for their service and eager to see us take to another level in our church context.

I think what went less well was my framing of the project. My promise to the participants was to work with them for only an hour per session. Due to many being seniors and some still in the workforce, I wanted to maintain that promise. However, I

believe that there needs to be more time devoted to specific sections. I think we tapped the service and opened the eyes and hearts of people, but gaining a proper understanding needed more than an hour. Some sessions should have been longer, while others could have been shorter.

In the future, I would like to do this again in our church context, but I would prefer to have more of a mixture of people in this grouping. I believe that this group was great, but we lacked three key groups as I did my summation. First, we need a male perspective. I believe one of the problems of the local church is the negation of the male point of view. Many of these are family or women-centered, but in the grand scheme, men may not have a place in many church contexts. Many men were contacted for our project, but only one could be a part of the group. In the future, I would like that to change to get a male point of view on our findings.

Second, I believe there needs to be more from 18-45. Our youngest participant was in their 50s. Now, this is accurate to the framing of our church because we do not have many people between 18-45, but they are there. I believe our church context is in a mode where we want younger persons to carry the load but we are willing to listen to their wisdom of point and this can no longer be unacceptable. People 18-45 are CEOs, small business owners, and possess advanced degrees. As a matter of fact, my contextual associates and one personal, professional associate are in that age bracket. They were able to help me formulate my thoughts as they see the current climate of those who are in the church and those who are on the outside.

Now grant it, the selection of those in the program was left up to me and yes there were a couple in that age group who could not participate due to scheduling.

Nevertheless, we need their perspective. We need to see how they and others around them view the church and church membership. We need to pinpoint what they are looking for and how we align ourselves with them while remaining true to the gospel message.

Then finally, I believe that new converts/recently joined members would be great for this discussion. One must weigh the pros and cons of this because one should not include those weak in their spirituality and faith journey. Nevertheless, they should be involved in asking why they walked away from the Lord's church. This should not be to criticize them but to blame ourselves. Their answers could show us where we fell short and how to improve. They can show us what attracted them to our context and how we can better in the days ahead. Most importantly they can show us how our church looks in the eyes of a "newcomer".

Nonetheless, for the most part, I believe that all participants grew in their faith journey. Moreover, as mentioned before, many have made a better commitment to Christ and the church because of this experience. They see what I see and have grabbed onto the vision. Now, there is no pushback from those persons as we are attempting to reengage the lost into the church and, most importantly, the kingdom of God.

In the future, my dream is for any church context that I serve in going forward to be a place where those who are not in church are able to find a haven. I believe that due to the way the world is now from a social, political, economic, and cultural standpoint, we are in a most miserable world. People are looking for answers and have tried everything. They see that their jobs, social agencies, and political leaders have no answers. Family is not enough, and our minds cannot take it. Therefore, as the hymn

says, “Where could I go but to the Lord.” It is my belief that churches in this season will be filled with persons who have no idea about our traditions, values, or customs. All they know is that Jesus has the answers I’m looking for, but where I choose to find those answers is up to me.

I believe churches need to put a handle on traditions that are not essential for salvation and become the community that God intended for it to be. We have allowed our preferences to keep people away from Christ. Moreover, for the church to grow, this must change. I believe this project helps people see why the change is necessary and how to implement it properly. My immediate goal is to publish this in some format and create a seminar that can help churches.

However, I believe this can go further than the church. People work best in community. Teachers, nurses, doctors, social workers, and even those in a factory work best when the environment is suitable to that of a community. A community where everyone is needed and valued. I believe this project can help in an interdisciplinary way. The principles can be used to help other industry reengage broken, hurt, and despondent workers to return to giving their best in the workplace.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE (PRE & POST)

Instructions: Please complete the questions below. Do NOT write your name or any other unnecessary descriptive factors.

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your ministry/church leadership role?

4. How many years have you served in that capacity?

5. How many years have you served in ministry?

6. What is your level of theological training?

7. In your own opinion, do you believe people do not attend church because of hardship/stress they are facing?

8. To your knowledge have you seen a fellow church members attendance or participation dwindle because of hardship/stress they are facing?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you define stress?
2. What coping mechanism do you utilize for dealing with stress?
3. How often do you feel stressed?
4. When you feel stressed, what makes you feel that way?
5. Do you verbalize the stress of your life with someone in the church?
6. Do you have a counselor?
7. If so what (per question 6) what suggestions have they given you for dealing with stress?
8. Does or has the stress in your life ever made you question God or distance yourself from church?
9. Do you feel it is your responsibility to help others who are stressed?
10. Are there any new mechanisms have you learned to help yourself or others that are feeling stressed?

APPENDIX C
JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Session 1

1. What do you expect to learn from this training cohort?

Session 2

1. Have you any at time felt like Naomi in Ruth? How did it make your feel and what did you do to cope with the situation?
2. Have you ever had a “Ruth” in your life? How did that person help you cope with what you were facing?

Session #3

1. Based on today’s lesson, how have you been called to help your local community/church?

Session #4

1. Based on today’s lesson, are we really being the “church”? How are we in the act of reengaging others?

Session #5

1. Based on today’s lesson, how can you help in another person’s healing process?

Session #6

1. Based on today’s lesson, please give some practical ways you can help in reengaging others back into the local church?

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